



ISSUE 124 • £3.99

EXCLUSIVE

NXT TAKEOVER

HOW TRIPLE-H EVOLVED THE DEVELOPMENTAL
BRAND INTO WWE'S GREATEST SUCCESS

GLOBAL FORCE WRESTLING

Can Jeff Jarrett's promotion
make a big splash in the UK?

WORLD BODYBUILDING FEDERATION

How Vince McMahon's dream quickly
became a promotional nightmare

THE UNDERTAKER >
STING >
JOHN CENA >
THE KLIQ >
THE YOUNG BUCKS >
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BATTLE OF LOS ANGELES

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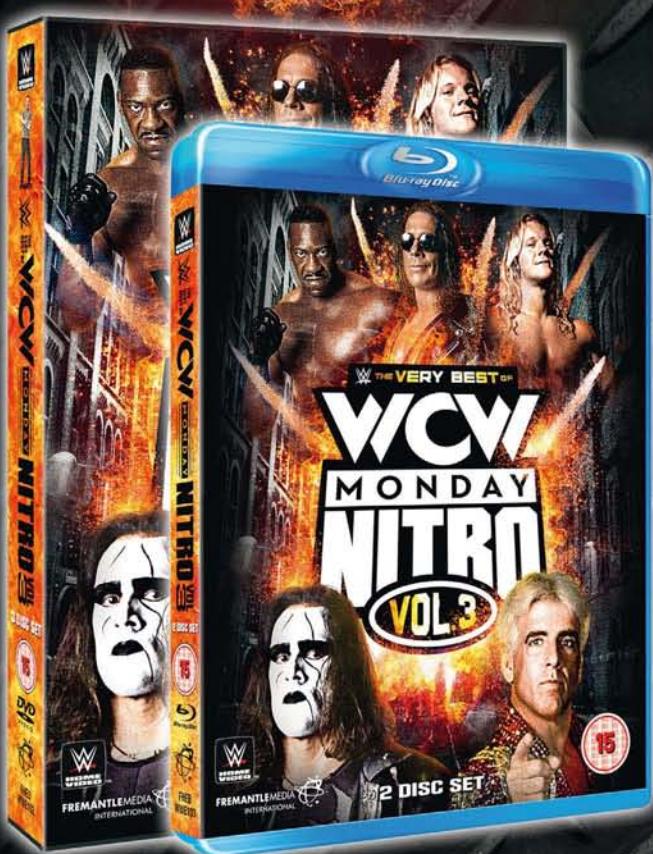


SASHA BANKS

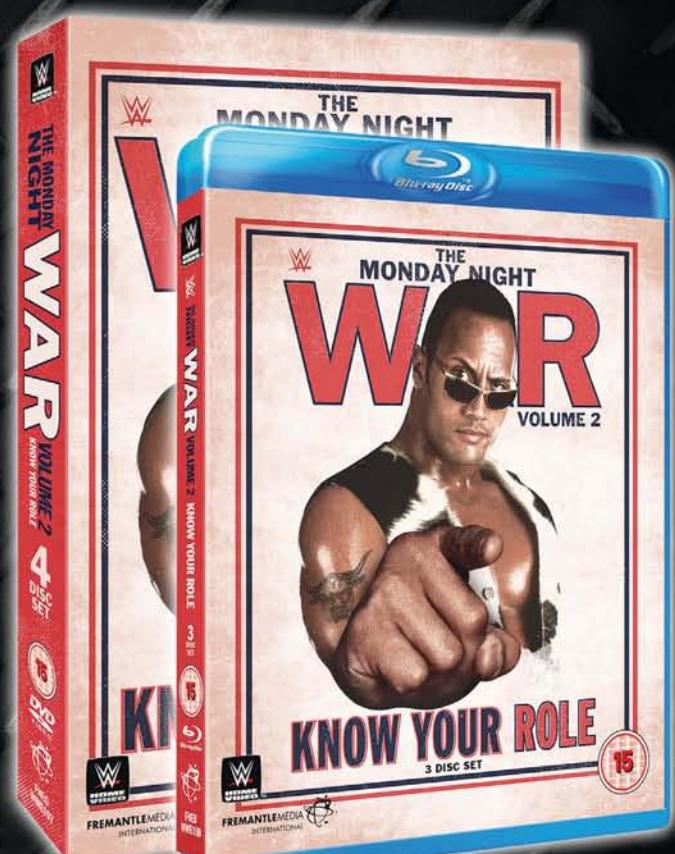
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FSM Welcome



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You can forget about Cesaro, and you can forget about Wade Barrett. You can forget about Neville, and you can forget about Big E. You can even forget about Daniel Bryan.

They aren't going to be what they could've been.

Vince McMahon has spoken, and not in so many words. It's not that he doubts the skill or passion of the aforementioned athletes – their ability to "connect" is a different matter – but rather that he has stacked the deck so absurdly against them that they have no chance of realising their potential.

One reason for this is that WWE is horribly overexposed.

The three hours of *Raw*, every single week, is an enormous problem; the company expects only the most dedicated fans to watch it all, therefore justifying its spotlighting of the same "stars", the all-important positioning of celebrities, and the string of nonsensical, buzzword-filled soundbites on the premise that it's more important to write for those who don't watch the show, than those who do.

Another big problem, of course, is the booking, where too many truly exceptional performers are reduced to speaking WWE jargon ("sports entertainment"; "WWE universe") to get over preposterous feuds opposite characters who've already had their cards marked by even-steven booking, or worse.

In Issue 116, Justin Henry was able to go into far greater detail on this subject, and frankly, I've already written more than I wanted to on it, while barely scratching the surface. What I really want to say is that even though *Raw* ratings are now at their lowest in 18 years, with no sign of fundamental creative change, there is one ray of hope: *NXT*.

To some degree, Triple-H's show gets back to basics. An easily digestible 60 minutes every week, *NXT* features simple but layered storytelling, and provides in-ring action that builds to bigger matches on truly special cards. In short, there's elements of what made the WWF so successful in the 1980s, coupled with today's production values and, most importantly, a healthy respect for wrestling fans.

In this issue, we've dedicated four pages to former *NXT* Women's champion Sasha Banks, a special talent who has the ability to lead the Divas revolution. We've also explored how *NXT* itself has evolved from a developmental brand to one that is capable of selling out live events, and even going on its own tour of the UK. Both articles attempt to look into the future with optimism, something in short supply from those who responded to Issue 122's *Raw* survey.

Those respondents, by the way, include a couple of performers you can watch on Mondays. Imagine fulfilling your dream of making it to *Raw*, only to find that you were better off in developmental.

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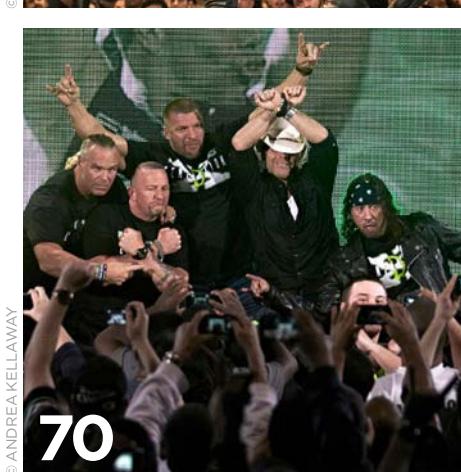
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"SASHA BANKS IS REACHING A POINT WHERE SHE IS ONE OF THE BEST WRESTLERS GOING, PERIOD. NOW IT'S JUST A MATTER OF HER DOING ON RAW WHAT SHE ACCOMPLISHED IN NXT"



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THE NXT STEP

Following the announcement of NXT's December tour of the UK, John Lister examines previous failures of WWE branding to attempt to answer questions about the future of what was originally conceived as a talent development group.

When Stephanie McMahon walked to the ring during *NXT TakeOver: Brooklyn*, she was greeted by a near-silence that was untypical of the evening's raucous crowd. It actually seemed as if her presence was out of place on a show that felt like a refreshing alternative to the usual WWE product, but given her job title, her appearance was very much appropriate; McMahon is Chief Brand Officer of World Wrestling Entertainment, and NXT is the company's greatest example of successful branding in many years.

The idea that a "promotion" with no broadcast television could sell 13,438 tickets for a show headlined by the former Kevin Steen and Prince Devitt is branding at work. The same group selling thousands of tickets for a tour of major UK arenas with no matches announced and only a small list of confirmed names (including the likes of Dana Brooke) takes branding to the next level.

Triple-H's vision for the NXT brand has been a remarkable critical success



The NXT boom follows several, largely failed attempts by WWE to use branding to diversify and increase live business and other income streams. But it also creates a dilemma: whether it's more important to build this alternative business or concentrate on NXT's original and primary purpose of developing new talent.

For most of its first four decades, WWE relied on a single brand (be it the WWWF, WWF or WWE), with no distinction made between the content of different live events. Before its national expansion, the pattern involved major arenas running once a month with all the top feuds, with the rest of the schedule made up of small, locally-promoted weekly loops where shows would feature a few headliners and some local talent.

When the promotion went national in the mid-1980s and began running up to four shows a night, it was still all under a single name, with much of the emphasis of local advertising on the specific stars and matches. An unspoken distinction related to venue size: the biggest show of the night would traditionally feature the reigning champion (therefore usually Hulk Hogan); the second biggest venue would be headlined by the Intercontinental title-holder; and smaller venues would commonly have a Tag Team championship match at the top. On the occasions that the company ran four shows, the smallest would often be in a high school gym where the mere appearance of WWF wrestling was the main draw, with the shows usually featuring only a couple of "name" matches and then a host of lesser-known talent, such as Dave Barbie or Jerry Allen.

Even once the group settled into a two shows per night schedule in late-1990, branding remained simple: all events were WWF shows, still pushed based on the headline performers.

That all changed in 2001. Or at least that was the plan.

DIVIDE AND CONQUER

After buying out World Championship Wrestling's intellectual property and a couple of dozen talent contracts, Vince McMahon initially had every intention of operating WCW as an additional, self-contained promotion with its own TV show and live tour schedule. There was even talk of the on-screen storyline of son Shane McMahon owning the promotion being something of a reality, with Shane overseeing the brand as a way of grooming him for a seemingly inevitable real-life handover of the WWF.

The idea was short-lived, however. TV executives expressed concern about carrying a tarnished brand; Vince himself got cold feet after a Booker T versus Buff Bagwell match promoted as a WCW presentation within an episode of *Raw* bombed with the live audience; and people who'd bought "WWF" house show tickets complained when they got word the shows might actually be WCW-branded events.

McMahon re-thought his plan, and instead used WCW (along with ECW) as part of an "interpromotional" angle that began to spectacular success (July 2001's *Invasion* achieved over 775,000 buys, a record for the highest non-*WrestleMania* event) only to see pay-per-view numbers plummet for three straight shows before WCW was formally buried at *Survivor Series*.

In 2001, it was mooted that Shane McMahon would take over WCW in a mirroring of the TV angle



@Big_Fudge791 I love these #TakeOver names and specials, they remind me of the old #InYourHouse PPVs back in the 90s.

While the WCW branding experiment stemmed from opportunity, McMahon's next such ploy stemmed from need. Concerned at a decline in the number of viable headliners and the overexposure of most stars appearing on television twice a week, he decided on a radical change to WWE's operations, by way of the brand extension. With the exception of the reigning champion, the entire roster was split into two groups, known by the names of their respective *Raw* and *Smackdown* TV shows, with those terms used heavily in promoting live events. Wrestlers from the respective brands initially appeared together only on pay-per-view, and eventually only the four biggest shows of the year would feature the entire roster.

The idea, while logical on paper, had several problems in practice. By employing different writing teams for each show, McMahon hoped to foster genuine competition between the two brands, but the difficulty was that, almost by definition, one brand (often *Raw*) would always draw better ratings than the other. All too often that was seized upon as evidence that whatever the "losing" brand was doing was not working, and any significant changes in style and presentation between the two shows was quickly eliminated, even if that differentiation might expand the total number of eyeballs on the product.

The other significant drawback was that while the split was very real to the roster (particularly friends and couples who no longer travelled together), to viewers *Raw* and *Smackdown* were largely the same thing in different colours. Such a disconnect became particularly clear with two *Bragging Rights* pay-per-views in 2009 and 2010; both shows were based around the brands squaring

off, but did among the lowest numbers of the year (181,000 and 137,000 buys worldwide respectively) because the average viewer had no reason to support one brand over the other.

The brand extension was slowly muddled with increasing crossovers before being dropped entirely in 2011.

THE FINAL EXTREME

McMahon made one more attempt at a "new" touring brand when he relaunched Extreme Championship Wrestling. While the audience loyal to WCW had long gone, the ECW initials were still being chanted years after its death, leading to an experimental *One Night Stand* pay-per-view in 2005. Despite receiving minimal promotion and having no confirmed line-up, the brand proved strong enough to attract 340,000 buys, putting it ahead of all but the traditional big four shows of the year.

A follow-up event in 2006 was the setup for a new ECW television show on SyFy, to act as a third brand that would be a combination of main roster stars needing a fresh start, former names from the original ECW incarnation, and new developmental talent judged to need national TV experience before moving up to *Raw* or *Smackdown*. The idea was to use the TV exposure and brand awareness to run live events, putting WWE back up to three shows a night for the first time in more than 15 years.

Unfortunately, while the brand initially had some decent crowds in mid-sized arenas, within a few months it was commonly drawing less than 1,000 fans, a figure WWE concluded was not economically viable. At the end of 2006, ECW

2005's *One Night Stand* was so popular that Vince McMahon eventually brought ECW back as a touring brand

"The NXT boom follows several, largely failed attempts by WWE to use branding to diversify and increase live business and other income streams"

One wonders where
WWE would have been
in the 2000s without
OVW feeding it talent
like John Cena

NXT UK TOUR DATES

WWE will bring the
NXT brand to the UK
for a self-contained
seven-date tour this
December, at the
following venues:

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 10:

Newcastle Metro
Radio Arena

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 11:

Glasgow SSE Hydro

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 12:

Sheffield Arena

SUNDAY, DECEMBER 13:

Blackpool Empress
Ballroom

MONDAY, DECEMBER 14:

Nottingham Capital
FM Arena

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 15:

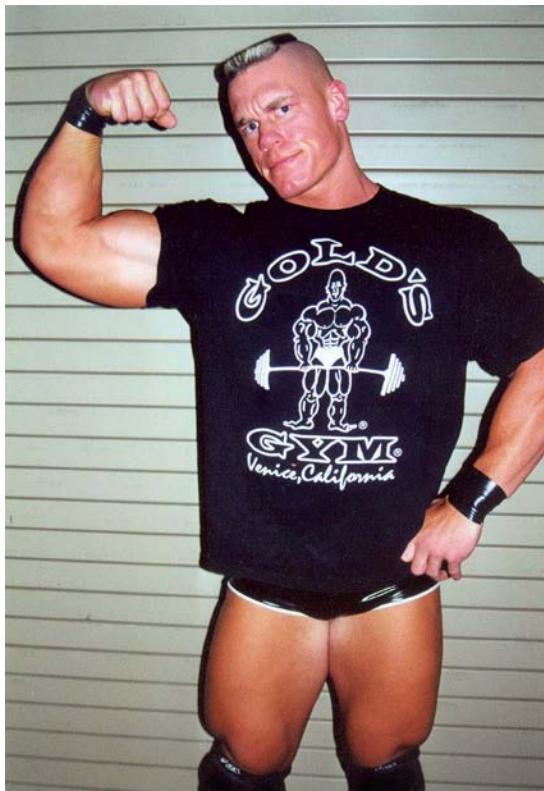
Cardiff Motorpoint
Arena

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 16:

London SSE
Arena (formerly
Wembley Arena)

The London show will
feature as a *TakeOver*
special, broadcast live
on the WWE Network.

Advertised talent
for the tour thus far
includes Finn Balor,
Samoa Joe, Batley,
Tyler Breeze, Dana
Brooke and Emma.



became a television-only property, surviving until 2010 when it was replaced by the first incarnation of *NXT*, a reality-style programme showcasing new talent in traditional matches and legitimate athletic and mental challenges. The show ran for five seasons, the final of which somehow lasted 59 weeks before being abandoned, with Darren Young, Titus O'Neil and Derrick "EC3" Bateman still in the competition.

DEVELOPING DEVELOPMENTAL

NXT as we now know it was never intended to be a nationally touring brand; it was simply designed to be the latest in a series of developmental "territories" based around a training school, to give work to young wrestlers. Such setups became necessary when the demise of the traditional territory system meant fewer and fewer new entrants to the business could develop their skills through regular public matches, something that became critical as WCW and ECW met their demise.

For many years, this involved arrangements with independent operations such as Memphis Championship Wrestling, Les Thatcher's Heartland Wrestling Association, Deep South Wrestling and, most notably, Ohio Valley Wrestling. In the space of just a few years, OVW developed or refined John Cena, Brock Lesnar, Randy Orton and Batista, a quartet without whom it's scary to imagine WWE in the 2000s.

In most of these cases, WWE offered a business relationship, such as part-funding the promotion or paying a salary to developmental talent, but did not formally control the operations. This led to numerous disagreements, most notably with Deep South Wrestling, where the training was of a boot camp style that rarely produced polished all-rounders.

WWE – arguably many years too late – decided to seize the bull by the horns and set up

a developmental territory from scratch that was more directly under its control. Run by Steve Keirn, Florida Championship Wrestling operated from 2007 to 2012 in Tampa, running house shows and producing a weekly television broadcast. WWE shut down FCW in 2012 when it switched its TV tapings to a new base at Full State University, under the *NXT* banner.

This was no ordinary rebranding. In a move spearheaded by Paul "Triple-H" Levesque, WWE decided to put some serious money into a purpose-built, full-time training facility: the WWE Performance Centre in Orlando. As well as a host of full-time and guest trainers, the facility boasts seven rings, an extensive gym, a room for practising promos, and an editing suite. It even has a 24/7 camera feed that can be viewed by Levesque at any time in his Connecticut office. Symbolically, it's on a screen placed next to the original WWF championship belt.

The original plan was for *NXT* to simply operate as a small-scale developmental territory with local live events in high school gyms and similar venues. Television would only air locally (and overseas) and serve more as a training exercise for wrestlers, announcers and producers than be a premium product in itself. Later, in 2012, it was added to the online Hulu service. While it was likely WWE would have struggled to get *NXT* on national television at this point anyway, there was also a feeling that it was better to avoid exposing developmental talent to a casual mainstream audience before they were judged ready for the big-time.

NETWORK CONNECTION

Everything changed with the launch of WWE Network in 2014. Adding *NXT* proved the perfect solution to the need to find low-cost programming and attract the interest of various types of fan. The shows soon became established as regulars in the Network's most-viewed list, usually behind only the monthly main roster "pay-per-view" events.

Whether WWE expected or even intended that to be the case is uncertain, but it appears the appeal came from the contrast between *NXT* and the bloated weekly programming of the main roster. The one-hour slot and the need to keep things both simple and cost-effective wound up producing a show that, while having a modern style in the ring, resembled the format of territory era studio shows.

This was greatly aided by the slimmed-down writing process, which for many months consisted largely of a single scriptwriter, Ryan Ward, putting the show together, with Dusty Rhodes lending his expertise from a wrestling perspective and Triple-H reviewing and signing off on the finished product. The result, with both the weekly TV and the *TakeOver* specials, has contained many of the aspects that appeal to long-term fans: wins and losses that have consequences and build to other bouts, short and to-the-point promos that relate to the in-ring action, and storylines that for the most part relate to wrestlers wanting to work their way up the ladder and overcome obstacles.

Noting the interest in the product, WWE began experimenting with capitalising on the brand at the live gates. In March, it held the first *NXT* live event outside of Florida in Columbus,

Sasha Banks and Charlotte main-evented the Philadelphia NXT show in May this year



© MIGUEL DISCART



calling up talent to the main roster when they are deemed ready, against the need to have marketable names for the demanding NXT audience. For example, having clearly mastered working for a multi-shoot, highly-produced television event, there's no doubt whatsoever that Finn Balor is more than ready to bring a fresh face to *Raw* and *Smackdown*, but his departure would have a significant effect on an NXT roster that's built a reputation for in-ring athleticism. Similarly, the simultaneous call-ups of Charlotte, Sasha Banks and Becky Lynch have left a void in the much-hyped women's division, leaving viewers wondering if the Iron Woman bout between Banks and Bayley in October might be the last such show-stealing female contest for some time.

There's also the question of how raised audience expectations from a touring NXT conflict with the goal of developing talent. Batista famously wrote of how he learnt little during his OVW spell because he was frequently booked in short, dominating squash matches – an approach Danny Davis and Jim Cornette felt necessary because of their own interest in building a money-drawing monster to help turn a profit. Just such a dilemma now exists with Baron Corbin: if the goal is to entertain the NXT audience, he is best used in similarly brief, destructive appearances, but his own career would best be served by longer matches in which the risk that things might go wrong is exactly the point of the learning exercise.

So what exactly is the primary goal of NXT? Is it a brand that's intended to maximise profits or is it a hugely expensive loss-leader that will pay off in the long run by developing the superstars of tomorrow?"

The release of a non-WWE Kevin Owens action figure has caused a dilemma for those who want to sign with ROH

Ohio, in conjunction with the Arnold Classic fitness event. Whereas it had mainly drawn crowds of a few hundred in Florida, both the Columbus show and a follow-up event in Cleveland drew four-figure sell-outs. The experiment continued in San Jose where, two days before *WrestleMania* in the same city, an NXT event sold out a 4,700-seater building.

By the time Triple-H spoke on a May conference call, the decision had been taken: NXT would be ramped up to a full-time touring brand, with the goal being to run three nights a week in 2016. At the same time, it would continue to put on smaller shows in towns around Florida as a way for less marketable and experienced performers to get to work in front of crowds that might have lower expectations. During the call, Triple-H impressed listeners by openly admitting he would be trying an experimental approach with the live touring, and that not everything would work as hoped.

Evidence that WWE was really going for it came the same month, when NXT hit Philadelphia for two straight nights, passing up the seemingly obvious option of hitting the hardcore Mecca of the 2300 Arena (formerly known as the ECW Arena) in favour of the larger Tower Theatre. Here NXT attracted around 3,500 people over the two nights, with the first concluded by Sasha Banks versus Charlotte in a match that the audience complete bought as a legitimate main event.

But nothing could compare to the step forward at *TakeOver: Brooklyn*, at which NXT not only drew the biggest U.S. crowd of a "non-WWE" brand since 2000, but did so in the same arena as *SummerSlam*.

Even more ambitiously, the event included the announcement of a UK tour, visiting the same venues that regularly play host to the main WWE roster.

TAKEOVER TARGETS

NXT is a success of branding in that the shows are selling tickets to see wrestlers who rarely drew crowds in the thousands even when they appeared on nationally televised shows for TNA and ROH that may very well have had more U.S. viewers than NXT. But it's also a success of supremely ironic branding, in that NXT now seems to draw a different audience to those attending ordinary WWE house shows: an audience disgruntled with the creative direction and style of the main roster product.

That this has been achieved under the public and private oversight of Levesque, once derided by "insider" fans for his political manoeuvrings, is no doubt particularly satisfying for the man who makes a point of taking selfies with former indy darlings and playing the Paul Heyman cheerleading role at major NXT shows.

It's clear that booking the likes of Samoa Joe, Rhyno and Jushin "Thunder" Liger, who even a superior-acting company such as WWE cannot describe as requiring more seasoning, is as much about attracting paid fans as it is preparing a crew for the main WWE roster. The question remains as to how the change of focus from pure developmental territory to a drawing brand in its own right affects the industry, from WWE to far beyond.

The potential for conflict is certainly there, with management now having to weigh up the benefits of

"Is NXT a brand that's intended to maximise profits or is it a hugely expensive loss-leader that will pay off in the long run by developing the superstars of tomorrow?"



Not for no reason does Triple-H enjoy selfies with former indy stars



NXT must now ask itself whether it wants to take the next step and provide a full-scale alternative to the main roster

the least keep losses to a minimum), or is it a hugely expensive loss-leader that will pay off in the long run by developing the WWE superstars of tomorrow? While keeping stockholders satisfied with short-term cash-flow is of course important, it's worth pondering that there's a strong argument that every penny spent on the WWE developmental systems before NXT was more than earned back by the discovery and training of John Cena alone.

The financial implications of the "new NXT" also extend to wrestler pay-offs. NXT talent was recently informed that they would not be receiving any bonuses for the *TakeOver: Brooklyn* event, and would instead receive only their fixed developmental contract money, a setup that will also apply to the UK tour, where ringside seats are going for as much as £100. Management is said to have argued that, despite the massive gates at such shows,

developmental as a whole still loses money. It was also noted that NXT performers not only get their travel and accommodation costs taken care of (unlike most main roster stars) but that they earn merchandise and videogame royalties despite their "trainee" status.

As much as it could be a bubbling tension if the brand continues to draw well on the road, it's unlikely any of those involved will be confident enough to kick up a fuss.

Another possible quandary with the expansion to a regular schedule is the in-ring style. It's certainly true that many major NXT matches have employed impressive ring psychology – Sami Zayn's title win over Adrian Neville on December 11, 2014 was a supreme example of every move meaning something – but the audience that is attending these live events has come to expect a hard-hitting, athletic style. There are obvious doubts over whether that can be maintained on a full schedule, or if the wrestlers will need to fall back farther on their personality and charisma. That's particularly true in the case of the UK tour, where they will be appearing for seven straight nights, making it impossible to go to the physical limit on every show.

NOW ON THE RADAR

The ramifications of the new-style NXT go beyond WWE. Between talent recruitment and the choosing of dates and locations, it soon became clear that NXT had put Ring of Honor firmly on WWE's radar this year. That was heightened by an edict from Vince McMahon that he would strongly prefer that any future NXT recruits to have not previously appeared on national television.

That decision came in response to Ring of Honor marketing a Kevin Steen action figure before WWE could do the same under his new incarnation of Kevin Owens. Ironic as it may be for McMahon to effectively be saying that he doesn't want to sign talent who have proven they can be marketed on a national level, it means NXT isn't just competition for winning over fans, as the cream of the crop on the U.S. indy scene will now have to consider whether working for ROH is in their best interests. One possible alternative is for WWE hopefuls to work for the family of promotions under the World Wrestling Network banner (including EVOLVE and Dragon Gate USA), with whom WWE has come to a private understanding.

Whatever is really going on in those circles, it remains the case that NXT has evolved from being the best-funded developmental territory and the smallest WWE brand to, in effect, the leading "independent" in the United States. WWE is now specifically aiming to make money by presenting a different-looking product to an audience that is at best lukewarm to its main roster presentation. It remains to be seen how long that can survive given the politics and ego involved with those who sincerely believe the *Raw* and *Smackdown* product is the superior and indeed only successful version of professional wrestling.

But for now, at least, WWE is profiting by using different initials and presentation styles to appeal to different sectors of the wrestling audience – the very definition of successful brand marketing.

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THE NEWS

“SUPERFLY” SNUKA FACING THIRD-DEGREE MURDER CHARGE... MAN SHOT OUTSIDE WWE PERFORMANCE CENTRE... NXT ANNOUNCES UK TOUR DATES... HULK HOGAN SET FOR SPOKEN WORD SHOW... UNDERTAKER TO WWE WORK EVENTS IN MEXICO THIS MONTH

WWE • TNA • UFC • RAW • SMACKDOWN • NXT • RING OF HONOR • UK

HALL OF FAMER SNUKA CHARGED WITH THIRD-DEGREE MURDER

Case relates to the death of then-girlfriend Nancy Argentino in 1982

IN A SHOCKING turn of events, WWE Hall of Famer “Superfly” Jimmy Snuka was indicted by the Lehigh County (Pennsylvania) Grand Jury on September 1, on charges of the third-degree murder and involuntary manslaughter of his girlfriend, Nancy Argentino. She passed away on May 11, 1983 following a traumatic head injury.

Snuka (born James Wiley Smith, now legally changed to Snuka) has switched his story regarding Argentino’s death multiple times. The story he told most consistently was that during an evening car journey, Argentino had gotten out to answer a call of nature at roadside, and had slipped and banged her head. They then carried on their journey to the George Washington Motor Lodge in Allentown, Pennsylvania. Snuka was booked to appear the following day – May 10, 1983 – at WWF TV tapings at the Allentown Agricultural Hall, and while he was at the afternoon taping, Argentino went to bed feeling sick. When Snuka arrived back, she was still unwell and largely unresponsive. Snuka apparently noted a lump on her head, and placed an iced towel on it. He then left to wrestle on the evening taping at the same venue, but when he returned, he found Argentino gasping for air and with yellow fluid oozing from her mouth and nose. She was pronounced dead hours later at Lehigh Valley Hospital.

In the subsequent police investigation, Snuka was not charged, and Argentino’s death was ruled an accident, even though forensic pathologist Isidore Mihalakis, who conducted the original autopsy, noted that there were marks of abuse on Argentino’s



© SCOTT FINKELSTEIN

Thirty years after Nancy Argentino’s death, Jimmy Snuka (here with wife Carole) has been charged with third-degree murder and involuntary manslaughter

body, including more than two-dozen cuts and bruises on her torso and limbs. Despite the lack of charges until now, the Argentino family has always believed that Nancy was murdered by Snuka. In 1985, they won a civil lawsuit against him to the tune of \$500,000, but Snuka later filed for bankruptcy and the money was never paid.

The Allentown Morning Call published a story on the 30th anniversary of Argentino’s death, which led to District Attorney James B. Martin reopening the case, and after a Grand Jury investigation, Snuka was finally charged. The former WWWF star, now aged 72, is battling stomach cancer, is wheelchair-bound, and his lawyers claim he is suffering from the early stages of dementia. They have therefore stated that he is not fit to stand trial, because he requires daily care and would be unable to comprehend prosecutors’ questions.

Upon being charged, Snuka was released on bail after posting a \$100,000 bond. No date has yet been set for the proposed trial.

THIS MONTH'S...



MEN OF THE MONTH

This month's Men of the Month award goes to **The New Day**. The trio has been hilarious over the past month; Xavier Woods' trombone playing, Big E's dancing, and Kofi Kingston's mic work have all been top-notch, and amongst the highlights of every show on which they've appeared. Kingston, in particular, is showing more charisma now than at any point in his near eight-year WWE career.



MATCH OF THE MONTH

The NXT Women’s title change from **Sasha Banks** to **Bayley** on the *Takeover: Brooklyn* show was a classic. Not only was both women’s work stellar on August 22, but the passionate reactions they brought out of the audience were something at which to be marvelled. Bayley and Banks will set another milestone when they main event the next *Takeover* show on October 7, in a 30-minute Iron Woman bout. Both certainly deserve that occasion.

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OSPREAY SHINES BRIGHT OPPOSITE BRILLIANT STAR ATTRACTION

22-year-old retains his PROGRESS championship

SEPTEMBER 6 WAS a night of surprises at PROGRESS Wrestling, with a change in attitude for the group's greatest antagonist, "The Villain" finally living up to his moniker, and an unannounced visit from two of the promotion's overseas friends.

Despite all of that, the main event delivered as advertised, with new PROGRESS champion Will Ospreay successfully defending his title against Mark Haskins. Ospreay and Haskins have upped their games even since their quarter-final meeting in the Super Strong Style 16 tournament in May, with Haskins putting together a fine string of performances across the UK, and Ospreay impressing at Pro Wrestling Guerrilla.

The bout marked a departure for Ospreay in PROGRESS, in that it was straightforward and honestly contested, rather than the grudge matches he's had recently. Haskins came close to making this reign a short one on several occasions, including a tight call off his Made in Japan pump-handle driver. However, Ospreay prevailed with both an imploding 450° and the 630° senton to retain his title.

Former titlist Jimmy Havoc did not have a contest scheduled heading into the show, but he emerged before intermission to demand a re-match with Ospreay. As PROGRESS does not offer automatic re-matches as part of its storylines, Havoc was forced into a No Disqualification bout with REGRESSION partner Paul Robinson, and this became one of the most violent matches in company history, with many different weapons used, including a table through which Havoc piledriven Robinson outside the ring. In a shocking outcome, however, Robinson triumphed by curb-stomping Havoc through light-tubes. As surprising as that was, a bloody Havoc then incredibly shook hands with Smallman, and having shown great effort in his loss, the fans at the Electric Ballroom gave him a standing ovation, and chanted his name. Havoc has been the subject of much speculation about his future, but despite being in New York for WWE's *SummerSlam* weekend, he is not currently planning a move to the U.S.

Kris Travis made a successful return to PROGRESS by defeating Marty Scurll in

Paul Robinson smashes Jimmy Havoc's face through light-tubes in a ultra-violent bout at Chapter 21



© www.robbrazerphoto.com

a fun contest. At the start, Scurll agreed to avoid attacking the stomach on which Travis had major surgery, but when "The Shooting Star" rolled Scurll up for the pinfall, he snapped after the latest in a run of defeats, kicking Travis in the gut before locking on his chicken wing submission hold to the point that the locker-room had to empty to break it up. Look for "The Villain" to have an increased role in PROGRESS going forward.

With no clear contenders for their PROGRESS Tag Team shield, The Sumerian Death Squad issued an open challenge ahead of *Chapter 21*, and there was disbelief in the Electric Ballroom when PWG World champion Roderick Strong emerged, and even more jubilation when he revealed his partner as former Ring of Honor World title-holder Adam Cole. The atmosphere for this tag team match was incredible, as Michael Dante and Tommy End went to war with Cole and Strong in one of the best tag team bouts in PROGRESS history, with the fans firmly behind the Dutchmen. Despite

the Tag Team titles coming close to being shipped over to America, it was Dante and End who isolated Cole and hit him with the Anti-Hero blockbuster to retain. PROGRESS sparingly uses American talent, but the level to which the fans took to Strong and Cole on their return shows how wisely the promotion does so.

The Origin grew in numbers and stature when El Ligero and Nathan Cruz were joined by Zack Gibson, a fellow participant in PROGRESS' first show back in 2012. The Origin claimed victory over The London Riots - despite James Davis and Rob Lynch powerbombing Ligero through three rows of chairs - when Gibson handed Cruz a fork with which to stab his opponents. Cruz later returned the favour by assisting Gibson in his victory over Eddie Dennis.

Jack Gallagher returned to PROGRESS after a solid showing at *Super Strong Style 16*, and he earned a victory over a game "Pastor" William Eaver with a Boston Crab, in a match that did just as much to keep Eaver strong as it did to elevate Gallagher.

NEWS IN BRIEF

In an alarming occurrence, a man was shot outside the WWE Performance Centre on August 31. Armando Montalvo, who was well-known to Performance Centre staff and the authorities, was shot by Corporal Stephen Wahl after approaching the building with what police believed to be a knife. Montalvo had a restraining order against him after becoming obsessed with at least two female wrestlers... NXT will tour across the UK in December, with shows in Newcastle (December 10), Glasgow (December 11), Sheffield (December 12), Blackpool (December 13), Nottingham (December 14), Cardiff (December 15) and London (December 16). Tickets are available from Ticketmaster... The Undertaker is set to work three WWE shows in Mexico from October 16-18. Jim Ross has also noted that he does not expect *WrestleMania XXXII* to be The Undertaker's last match... TV enemies Paige and Alicia Fox were involved in an altercation with a patron at Supano's Steak House in Baltimore on September 6. Paige claimed that she was being filmed against her wishes, and when confronted about it, a woman threw a drink on her. Paige reciprocated and both parties were ejected from the establishment... Hulk Hogan appeared on *Good Morning America* and *Nightline* on August 27, in pre-recorded interviews where he apologised for racist remarks made in 2007. Unfortunately for him, he did not appear convincing, and didn't help his cause when he claimed that the word "n***er" was a term thrown around by he and his friends as he grew up. He also stated that he was suicidal at the time he was taped using that term. In any case, Hogan is headed to the UK on November 14 for a spoken-word show at the Sheffield Arena. Also appearing are Jimmy Hart, Lanny Poffo, Bushwhacker Luke, Tugboat, The Dynamite Kid and Outback Jack. If you remember who the latter is, you really know your professional wrestling... WWE has signed Japanese women's wrestler Kana (real name: Kanako Urai), as confirmed in a September 8 press conference in Tokyo. She will be known as Asuka (borrowed from All Japan Women star Lioness Asuka) and will link up with NXT, as will Athena (real name: Adrienne Reese) of SHINE fame. CMLL's Dark Angel (Sarah Stock) has finished up with that group in order to join WWE as a trainer at NXT... Biff Busick and Rich Swann have also penned deals with the company...

continued...

UK NEWS

Too Cool and Mr Anderson celebrate their main event victory with a young fan



© TONY KNOX

BUBBLEGUM BURSTS AS ANDERSON AND TOO COOL TRIUMPH

Friends With Benefits go down after defeat in Blackpool

PRESTON CITY WRESTLING held its first show outside of its home city on Saturday afternoon, August 29, presenting a free *Bank Holiday Bash* event at the magnificent Empress Ballroom at Winter Gardens, Blackpool. The show itself, funded entirely by a Blackpool Town Council initiative to increase tourism, was originally scheduled to take place outdoors, but due to weather concerns, was moved inside, coincidentally into the same venue that NXT will run on December 13.

PCW drew a strong crowd of roughly 1,500 fans, with a more family atmosphere than the regular *Evoque* nightclub cards. This affected the usual PCW atmosphere to an extent, with many of the chants not catching on, or having any longevity. The product presented was also rather PG, to the extent of a sensible ban on swearing by any performers, which meant that the PCW champion couldn't be announced by his nickname, "The Bastard", either.

In the main event of the show, TNA's Mr Anderson (subbing for Kris Travis, and working twice as a result) teamed with former WWE stars Too Cool (Brian Christopher and Scotty Too Hotty) to defeat Bubblegum, Rampage Brown and Iestyn Rees in an energetic, comedic match that hit the spot with this audience, especially when all three

babyfaces hit their finishing moves on Bubblegum to win via pinfall.

It was, indeed, a simple show overall, with the babyfaces going over in all of the matches, with only Sha Samuels (predictably, given his recent booking and the apparent long-term plans for him) protected from a pinfall loss. Dave Mastiff retained his PCW title, defeating Nick Aldis in a good, athletic match, pinning him with a roll-up. Lionheart defeated Sha Samuels via disqualification, when "The East End Butcher" choked the Scot with his scarf. The match never really got going, perhaps because this wasn't the best audience for Samuels' very physical brawling style. These two will re-match in a No Holds Barred affair at PCW's next event, *Heroes*, on September 25.

In the best match on the card, Davey Richards and Eddie Edwards beat Joey Hayes and Martin Kirby in a fast-paced encounter; Mickie James was victorious over Toni Storm; and Noam Dar defeated Ashton Smith via Champagne Super Kneebar in a fine contest. In a rarity, Dave Rayne scored a clean victory, pinning "Gentleman" Gilligan Gordon after a sit-out powerbomb, while in the perfect opener for this show, Mr Anderson teamed with Viper to defeat the always entertaining So Scandalous duo of Ryan Smile and Damian Dunne.

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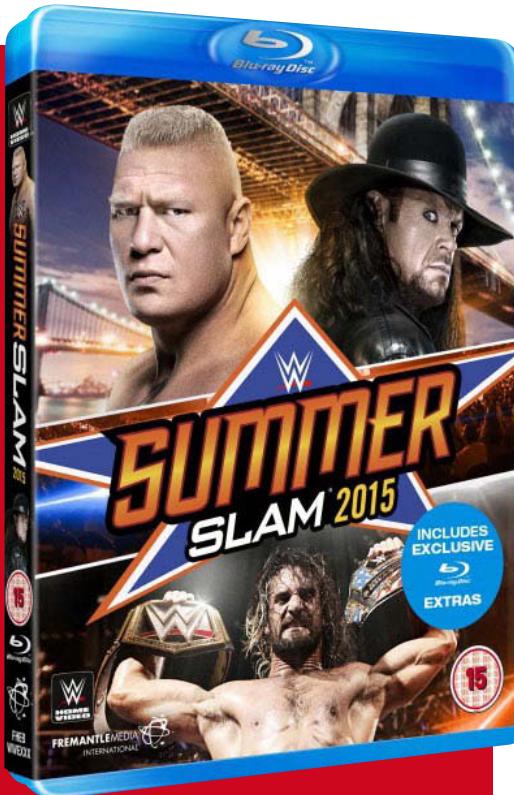
After Brock Lesnar destroyed The Undertaker's 21-0 streak at *WrestleMania XXX*, "The Deadman" is out for revenge as the two collide in this highly-anticipated return match.

To be in with a chance of winning, please email the correct answer to the following question to customerservice@uncookedmedia.com.

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- a) Diesel
- b) Bret Hart
- c) The Undertaker

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NEWS IN BRIEF

...continued

July 19's *Battleground* PPV is believed to have achieved 24,000 buys in North America and 52,000 in the rest of the world... With Ronda Rousey filming *Mile 22* in Thailand in March and April, she won't be at *WrestleMania*. UFC President Dana White wasn't about to let her wrestle anyway... On

September 6, Lana broke her wrist in training for a mixed tag team match with Dolph Ziggler against Rusev and Summer Rae. The injury required surgery, which she had on September 10. She'll be out for four months...

Wade Barrett has been off TV in order to film a WWE movie named *Eliminators*. Before announcing that he was "heading home, and not a moment too soon", Barrett changed his Twitter moniker to his real name, Stu Bennett, in a tactic many wrestlers now use to get internet fans talking...

Zahra Schreiber, an NXT trainee who was a victim of a highly-publicised revenge porn attack by the then-girlfriend of Seth Rollins in February, has been fired by WWE after she appeared to glorify the Nazi swastika in Instagram posts from 2012. She maintained that the symbol signifies "prosperity and luck".... John Cena made his 500th Make-a-Wish Foundation appearance on August 24. Cena has now granted more wishes than any celebrity in the charity's history... In an article published on September 16, Dixie Carter admitted to SI.com that *Impact Wrestling* would be leaving Destination America at the end of the year. Originally scheduled for cancellation at the end of

September, the extra time is seemingly to allow TNA to find another station... Bram (real name: Thomas Latimer) was arrested on August 30 after being accused of domestic battery by strangulation, as well as false imprisonment. He was released on a \$6,000 bond (£3,900). He has been suspended by TNA pending court proceedings, but confirmed a booking with UK group Pride Promotions for November 1... During an interview with former WCW announcer Mark Madden, Kurt Angle stated that he won't be signing a new TNA deal when his contract expires in January. TNA has been moving everyone to freelance agreements for some time now. Angle also claimed he would not seek a deal with WWE... Both TNA and Ring of Honor will now stream PPVs on the Flips app. *Wrestle Kingdom* was inordinately expensive when it aired on the same platform in January...

continued...

THE TROPHY CASE

WWE CHAMPIONS...	TNA CHAMPIONS...	UFC CHAMPIONS...	ACCURATE AS OF 19/09/2015
WWE WORLD HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION Seth Rollins	TNA HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION Ethan Carter III	UFC HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION Fabricio Werdum	UFC FEATHERWEIGHT CHAMPION Jose Aldo
UNITED STATES CHAMPION Seth Rollins	KING OF THE MOUNTAIN CHAMPION Bobby Roode	UFC LIGHT-HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION Daniel Cormier	UFC BANTAMWEIGHT CHAMPION TJ Dillashaw
INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPION Ryback	X-DIVISION CHAMPION Tigre Uno	UFC MIDDLEWEIGHT CHAMPION Chris Weidman	UFC FLYWEIGHT CHAMPION Demetrious Johnson
WWE TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS The Prime Time Players	TNA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS The Wolves	UFC WELTERWEIGHT CHAMPION Robbie Lawler	UFC WOMEN'S BANTAMWEIGHT CHAMPION Ronda Rousey
DIVAS CHAMPION Nikki Bella	KNOCKOUTS CHAMPION Gail Kim	UFC LIGHTWEIGHT CHAMPION Rafael Dos Anjos	UFC WOMEN'S STRAWWEIGHT CHAMPION Joanna Jedrzejczyk

NEWS IN BRIEF

...continued

ROH is heading back to Japan in February 2016, running two shows at Korakuen Hall in Tokyo in a co-promotion with New Japan... Grammy-nominated rapper Wale is considering starting his own wrestling company... CHIKARA's King Of Trios tournament was won by Team AAA (Drago, Fenix & Aero Star) on September 6, as they beat The Young Bucks and AJ Styles in the final. UK teams included Team ATTACK! (Mark Andrews, "Flash" Morgan Webster & Pete Dunne) and Team Fight Club: Pro (Daniel Moloney, Trent Seven & Tyler Bate)... Jax Dane captured the NWA heavyweight title from Hiroyoshi Tenzan on August 29 in San Antonio, Texas... In results from DDT's Ryogoku Peter Pan show previewed in Issue 122, New Japan's Hiroshi Tanahashi pinned HARASHIMA; Kota Ibushi & Daisuke Sasaki won the K-OD Tag Team titles from Daisuke Sekimoto & Yuji Okabayashi; and Yukio Sakaguchi beat KUDO to take the K-OD openweight championship... In an emotional moment, Hayabusa (real name: Eiji Ezaki), whose career was ended when he was paralysed in an in-ring accident in 2001, managed to walk to the ring on an August 5 Korakuen Hall show. He was given a standing ovation by an audience that included many well-known wrestlers... Boby Zavala pinned Guerrero Maya Jr. in the finals of CMLL's *Busca en un Idolo (In Search of an Idol)* on August 21. Also on the card, La Sombra, Rush and Mascara defeated Atlantis, Maximo and Valiente, which led to the 82nd Anniversary Show on September 18, where Sombra faced Atlantis in a Mask vs. Mask match. In some baffling booking, Sombra lost his NWA middleweight title to Ultimo Guerrero on August 31, while Atlantis beat Mephisto on August 24 to capture the Mexican National light-heavyweight title... On August 31, Psycho Clown defeated Chessman to win the AAA Latin American heavyweight title... Duke Myers, who is best remembered for a heel run with Stampede Wrestling in the 1980s, passed away on August 22. Bret Hart described Myers (real name: Floyd Myers) as "one of the most solid and steady wrestlers ever to work up here".... Jim Lynam, the promoter of U.S. independent All American Wrestling, passed away on August 4 during a heart operation. He was 42... The UFC has announced a February 27 card at the O2 Arena in London...

continued...

UK NEWS

Stevie Boy soars through the air as The NAK puts another beating on Mikey Whiplash



GALLOWAY ON THE FRINGES OF EDINBURGH DEFEAT

Joe Coffey loses out, but Grado plans to challenge ICW champion in November

NIGHT THREE OF Insane Championship Wrestling's four-show Edinburgh Fringe run saw the company put on its strongest card to date in the capital, but the following week's event would hold the most significance for the future.

During August 16's Night Three, subtitled *The Ministry Of Silly Headlocks*, ICW heavyweight champion Drew Galloway took on Joe Coffey in a re-match from *Barramania*. Coffey had demanded another title shot during his most passionate promo to date at August 9's *And Now For Something Completely Different*, urging the crowd to sit on the ground until Red Lightning bowed to his demand. Instead, he offered Coffey the chance to earn a title shot if he could beat Galloway, an occurrence that would have been nothing short of a miracle given the alliance between the General Manager, heavyweight champion and acolyte Jack Jester. Indeed, as Coffey got within touching distance of victory, Red Lightning cancelled the bout mid-match and ordered Jester and Sha Samuels to attack, thereafter giving the injured challenger his match. In typical Red Lightning fashion, he celebrated a moral victory over the crestfallen Coffey as if he had recaptured the ICW title, giving him his second win of the night after a shenanigan-ridden success over Noam Dar.

On August 23's final Fringe show, *A Horse, A Spoon & A Bucket*, Galloway put the title on the line against Kris Travis, with Travis coming

within a whisker of adding a World title to his comeback trail. There were superkicks aplenty from Travis, but a Futureshock DDT eventually kept the championship with its owner. Fans were then stunned to see dastardly trio The Black Label attack Travis when he refused to join the group, but they were thwarted by Grado, Joe Coffey and Damian O'Connor. Grado then told Galloway that he intends to challenge whomever may be ICW champion at the 5,000-capacity SECC in November. Angry, Galloway accepted the early challenge.

Grado had less serious business to take care of on the rest of the Fringe run, as he teamed with Colt Cabana in pursuit of the ICW Tag Team titles. On August 2, the duo overcame The Rodgers Brothers to take the number one contendership, only for "Irn Jew" to put it on the line a week later in a frolic-fuelled funfest against The Gzrs. This was a masterclass in slapstick comedy, as Tom Irvin was sent headfirst across a slip'n'slide and into partner Sebastian's groin, allowing the babyfaces to hit the GTS/Wee Boot combo for the win.

Polo Promotions was another issue entirely, as they resisted all of Irn Jew's overtures to turn their title challenge at *A Horse, A Spoon & A Bucket* into chaos, and the ICW Tag Team champions thus retained with a double-team German suplex on Cabana. That defeat was the first sign of fractures appearing in Irn Jew's cheery exterior, and the cracks turned into a full-blown crater when they took on Kid Fite and the debuting Magnus at

Spacebaws – Come As You Are on August 30 in Glasgow. Cabana was irked as Grado got preoccupied with hitting the Roll'n'Slice (corner cannonball) on James R. Kennedy, leaving Magnus to capture the pinfall on Cabana. He took to the mic and warned Grado that he didn't have a hope of taking the title from Drew Galloway if he didn't cut out the nonsense, and he left the ring urging The 55 to teach Grado a harsh lesson. Luckily for Grado, he had substantial backup, as Damian O'Connor and Mark Dallas emerged, with Dallas telling Red Lightning that his job would be on the line at the next show, as he was due his yearly performance review. Dallas also made a match demanded by O'Connor, where "The Beast From Belfast" would face Jack Jester. After emphatic wins over Dickie Divers and Kid Fite during the Fringe run, O'Connor is not a man who's wrath is going to be quelled soon, even if Jester did manage a predictably interference-riddled win over Noam Dar at *And Now For Something Completely Different*.

The NAK versus Legion feud shows no signs of coming to an amicable conclusion, as the two teams continued to try and wipe each other off the face of the planet. The Sumerian Death Squad had its ICW Tag Team title shot on August 9, but The NAK got revenge for the beating they suffered a week earlier, providing the distraction that allowed Tommy End to be hit with the double-team German suplex, as Polo Promotions became the longest-reigning ICW Tag Team champions.

Chris Renfrew also provided a helping briefcase earlier in the night, allowing Jack Gallagher to overcome Mikey Whiplash in a wrestling masterclass, when Renfrew laid Whiplash out with a shot to the skull and placed Gallagher on top of him for the pinfall. Whiplash would gain some revenge the week after, as a video of him whipping his own naked body played during a Renfrew versus Davey Boy bout, which gave Davey enough time to hit his fireman's carry cutter for the win in what an intense opening contest.

The Legion's joy was temporary, however, as the group tasted defeat on August 16 in a mutual maiming ritual masquerading as a six-man tag match with Wolfgang, Stevie Boy and BT Gunn. This time Renfrew would get involved in a bout notable for Stevie Boy launching himself from the balcony to the ring, with Renfrew's Stone Cold Stoner allowing BT Gunn to get the pinfall.

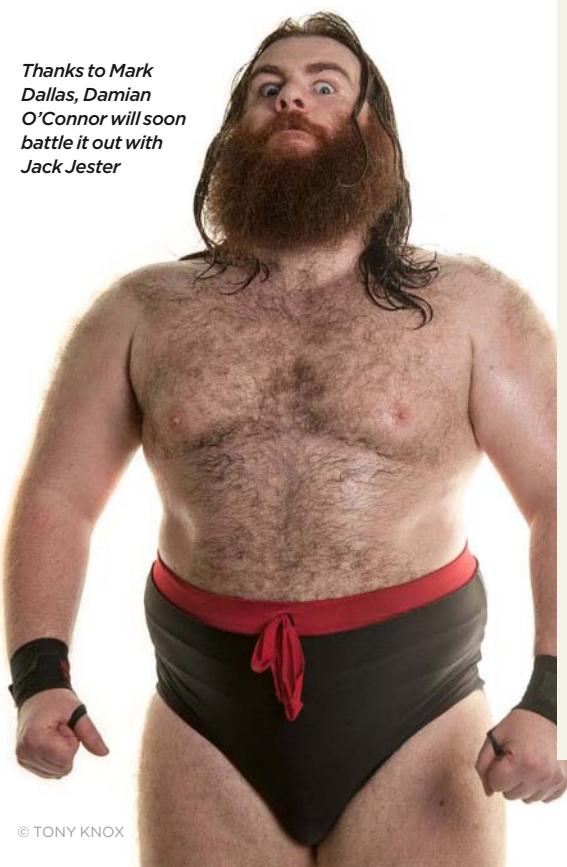
During the final Fringe show, it was once again down to Whiplash to fight The Legion's corner, and the solo venture did not go well. First, Whiplash stepped in after Stevie Boy's farcical Zero-G title match against stablemate Wolfgang, and demanded he put the title on the line in a competitive bout. Stevie accepted, but as good as their battle was, it was merely a precursor for the sacrifice to come. The NAK intervened before Whiplash

got a sniff of the belt, and laid him out with 10 brutal kendo stick shots to the back, double the amount BT Gunn had taken three weeks earlier, before Gunn himself finished the job with a sickening shot to the head. Stevie Boy would have a legitimate challenge to contend with in the main event of *Spacebaws*, with Polo Promotions' hugely popular DCT falling short in an absorbing finale to the show.

The Fringe events also saw the ICW Women's title tournament begin, as the peerless Nikki Storm easily overcame Debbie Sharpe to advance. Layla Rose also looked strong when she prevailed over Sammi Jayne, and Viper held off a spirited charge from Kasey Owens. That left just one quarter-final to take care of, as Kay Lee Ray revealed her new NAK-fuelled villainous exterior before her bout with former WWE Women's champion Mickie James at *Spacebaws*. James showed a less PG side of her character, but she couldn't stop Kay Lee handing her a debut loss thanks to a rope-assisted roll-up.

Lionheart had another chance to chalk up his first win since returning to ICW when he took on Kenny Williams during the third Fringe show, but the crowd fell silent as Lionheart collapsed midway through the bout, seemingly suffering a reoccurrence of his serious neck injury. As a path was cleared for medics to attend to him, however, Lionheart leapt up, hit a superkick, and pinned Williams in front of a stunned crowd. These were actions for which he showed no remorse two weeks later at *Spacebaws*, as he and Williams came to blows following the latter's Match of the Night victory over Aaron Echo. Lionheart ended the exchange by hooking in the Styles Clash, with Noam Dar making the save just in the nick of time.

Thanks to Mark Dallas, Damian O'Connor will soon battle it out with Jack Jester



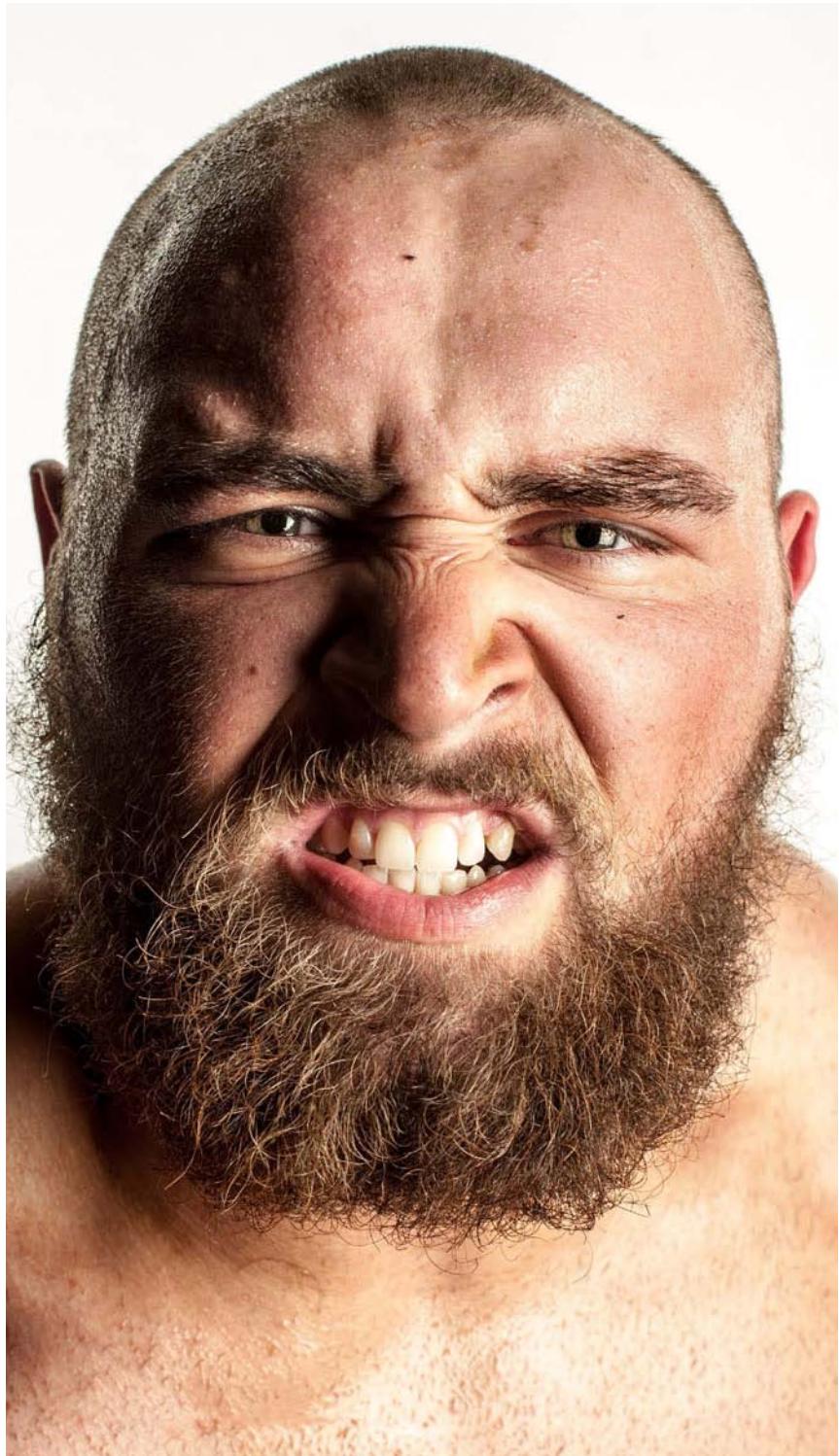
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NEWS IN BRIEF

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Nick Diaz was banned for five years and given a \$165,000 fine by the NSAC on September 14, after failing a drug test for marijuana for the third time. The punishment seemed excessive given Anderson Silva's one-year ban after being found to have taken steroids, but Diaz has shown no desire to conform to NSAC rules and has recently been convicted of a DUI... As of this month, the public will be able to see what fighters have been tested under the new UFC/USADA drug programme, as well as their results... Instead of a re-match with Miesha Tate, Ronda Rousey will next defend her UFC Women's bantamweight title against Holly Holm at the Etihad Stadium in Melbourne, Australia on November 15. The bout was moved from January 2 in Las Vegas when Robbie Lawler's welterweight defence against Carlos Condit was scrapped when Lawler sustained a thumb injury. The UFC has always expected the card to sell 70,000 tickets for the highest attendance in its live event history... Cris Cyborg claims she is going to compete at 140lbs in November, in a bid to next fight Rousey at 135lbs for the UFC bantamweight title... UFC light-heavyweight contender Anthony Johnson found himself in hot water in September after a Facebook rant in which he insulted a female gym-goer because she began a yoga workout in the weightlifting area of a gym at which he was working out. Johnson - who pleaded no contest to a domestic violence charge in 2009 and had accusations of domestic violence thrown out of court last year - was then investigated by a private law firm on behalf of the UFC. He apologised to the woman and agreed to make a donation to a women's charity... The first PRIDE World heavyweight champion, Antonio Rodrigo Nogueira, announced his retirement on September 1... UFC fighter Jordan Mein, last seen losing to Thiago Alves in January, has also retired, as has 31-year-old Sam Stout... Inaugural *Ultimate Fighter* competitor Chris Leben was sentenced to 120 days in prison and three years probation after breaking into the apartment at which he and his estranged wife once lived. Leben violated a restraining order his wife had against him... On September 12, Floyd Mayweather took his record to 49-0 by winning a decision over Andre Berto. Mayweather claims he has now retired, but with the right opponent, there will be huge money in a bout that could take him to 50-0.

CRAIG KOLLINS



Craig Kollins is now making good on the potential he first showed in 2010



© TONY KNOX

Height: 5ft 10in

Weight: 217lbs

Nickname: "The One Man Riot"

Signature moves: ASBO elbow; Section 18 knee-bar; Riot Kick; cannonball

Titles held: PAID Promotions heavyweight title

Worked for: PAID Promotions (now Alpha Omega Wrestling), XWA, GPW, PCW, KOW

In 2014, the Government's Office of National Statistics gave Barrow-in-Furness the unenviable title of Britain's "least happy" place to live, and it's true that you'll rarely see Barrow native Craig Kollins crack a smile. The 23-year-old from the industrial Cumbrian town is all business inside the squared circle; a young man with malice in his heart but possessing an explosiveness, a grasp of wrestling fundamentals, and a ring intelligence to go alongside an undoubted violent streak.

"Craig has something that sets him apart from a lot of young wrestlers, and that's believability," said Greg Lambert, who set up the Morecambe training school where Kollins learnt the ropes. "He has the menacing glare of a street thug, and looks like he could beat you up. For me, he has the potential to be mentioned in the same breath as Martin Stone, Rampage Brown, T-Bone or Sha Samuels as an uncompromising British brawler who can also wrestle."

Potential is the word Kollins' trainer, Jamie "Johnny Phere" Hutchinson says came to mind when he first clapped eyes on him when he enrolled at the school in 2010.

"Craig is not a person to hold back, and he quickly became our number one student," said Phere, the 14-year veteran known as "The Psychotic Warrior". "Since then, he has continued to grow and learn the true art of what professional wrestling is. He has the look. He has the wrestling skills. He has the talking skills. He has the right professional

Stixx had his hands full with Kollins on several occasions this year



© TONY KNOX



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attitude, and the toughness to be something special. I strongly advise more wrestling promoters to take notice."

Some high-profile UK companies have given Kollins (real name: Craig Richardson) a chance to show what he can do. Steven Fludder of Preston City Wrestling put Kollins and his fellow Barrow up-and-comer, Chris Ridgeway, in a dark match at a PCW event back in May 2013, and Kollins did enough to earn a spot in the annual PCW rumble at *Who Dares Wins* in March 2014.

Since then, Kollins has improved considerably. A year-long reign as PAID Promotions champion in the Lancashire seaside town of Morecambe saw him score wins over standout UK pair Joey Hayes and Bubblegum.

"Every time he steps into the ring, he means business," said Pip "Bubblegum" Cartner. "What he does is just pure punishment. [He's] an example of what a bad guy should be."

After triumphing in his most high-profile bout to date, a clean pinfall victory over Doug Williams at *War On The Shore*, held in Morecambe's historic Winter Gardens theatre in April 2015, Kollins lost the championship to Stixx in a fiery brawl containing big moves and heavy drama at *All Or Nothing* on June 20. It was a match that "The Heavyweight House of Pain" said was one of his favourite bouts of the year.

It was the third meeting between Kollins and the respected Nottingham-based powerhouse, and their hard-hitting styles have meshed perfectly in creating a trio of memorable battles.

"When you wrestle someone for the first time, it can always be hit and miss," said Paul "Stixx" Grint. "A feeling-out process needs to be had in most cases, but I never felt that with Craig Kollins. Each match was more important than the last, and they have all exceeded expectations."

"He is aggressive, intense and a real student when it comes down to what you want to achieve from the match in hand," Stixx added. "I'll go as far as to say that over the last few years, he has become one of my favourite opponents, stylistically and mentally."

GRAND PLAN

With Kollins now also making regular appearances for Grand Pro Wrestling in Wigan, where he quickly progressed to main events, it won't be long before other UK companies cotton on to the skills and drive of "The One Man Riot". In the meantime, he is gearing up for a huge match in Morecambe on October 11 at the Winter Gardens, where the student will take on the teacher.

PAID Promotions has now been renamed Alpha Omega Wrestling, following a year-long storyline where Stixx' Alpha Omega faction emerged victorious in a power struggle against the PAID crew, led by Kollins and Lambert. And in the main event of the first AOW show, *Revelation*, Kollins will square off against Johnny Phere, the man who trained him.

"It's been an intense build-up for this match, which I wanted to be a bit like when Sabu and Taz feuded in ECW all those years ago; two warriors who were constantly confronting each other, but never actually fought until the big blow-off," said Lambert, who also helps book Alpha Omega Wrestling.

"Both men have cost each other matches, they've cheap-shotted each other, they've been pulled apart by security, and they've had me – as authority figure – telling them the match will never happen, which of course made the fans want it all the more."

"Phere is so over-the-top and maniacal, and Kollins is like a younger version of him. They're two dedicated professionals who are both taking this match extremely seriously, and intend to go all-out to create a spectacle on October 11."

"It's going to be a war!"



© TONY KNOX

"Kollins has the potential to be mentioned in the same breath as Martin Stone, Rampage Brown, T-Bone or Sha Samuels as an uncompromising British brawler who can also wrestle"

UK EVENTS

COMPILED BY DARREN POTTS

FSM SUGGESTS SOME OF THE FINEST PRO WRESTLING TAKING PLACE IN THE UK THIS MONTH



Leah Owens will wrestle for W3L on October 2 in Musselburgh



A 02/10/15 W3L "WRESTLUTION IX"
Brunton Hall, Musselburgh

B 10/10/15 PBW
Dobbie Hall, Larbert

C 16/10/15 BWP "ROOKIE DIVISION PROVING GROUND 15"
Penyffordd Legion, Penyffordd

D 23/10/15 4FW
Somerset Hall, Portishead

E 25/10/15 FUTURESHOCK WRESTLING "UPROAR"
Stockport Guildhall, Manchester

F 28/10/15 SOUTHSIDE WRESTLING "BEDLAM IN BEDFORD"
Bedford Corn Exchange, Bedford

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02/10/15 Revolution Pro Wrestling "Uprising": York Hall, Bethnal Green

02/10/15 RWA: The Studio, Widnes

02/10/15 Welsh Wrestling: Theatr Brycheiniog, Brecon

02/10/15 MEW: Northumbria University, Northumbria

03/10/15 4FW: Thatcham Hall, Thatcham

03/10/15 WZW: Balmedie Leisure Centre, Balmedie

03/10/15 HCW: Conquest Theatre, Bromyard

03/10/15 DOA: "Two-Year Anniversary Show": United Services Club, March

03/10/15 MMW: Tang Hall WMC, York

03/10/15 RPW "Global Wars UK": Rivermead Leisure Complex, Reading

03/10/15 W3L "Wrestling Showdown": Carnegie Leisure Centre, Dunfermline

04/10/15 W3L "Wrestling Showdown": Cosmos Community Centre, St Andrews

04/10/15 Future Shock Wrestling "Slam": Rylands Club, Warrington

08/10/15 ICW "Road To Fear & Loathing Tour – The Lorraine Kelly Experience": Fat Sams, Dundee

09/10/15 ICW "Road To Fear & Loathing Tour – One Fall Brawl": O2 Academy, Newcastle

09/10/15 Welsh Wrestling: Princess Royal Theatre, Port Talbot

10/10/15 Southside Wrestling "Violent Euphoria": Corporation, Sheffield

10/10/15 ICW "Road To Fear & Loathing Tour – Bazoos Circus": Engine Rooms, Southampton

10/10/15 Southside Wrestling "99 Problems But Violence Ain't One": Corporation, Sheffield

10/10/15 HCW: Hartlebury Parish Hall, Hartlebury

11/10/15 TGW "True Grit Games": House of Grit, Wakefield

11/10/15 ICW "Road To Fear & Loathing Tour – Barely Legal Tender": Koko, London

11/10/15 IPW:UK "Just Too Good": The Tonbridge Centre, Kent

11/10/15 JDW: Windle Labour Club, St Helens

11/10/15 AOW "Revelation": Winter Gardens, Marine Road

16/10/15 ICW "Road To Fear & Loathing Tour – Where The Buffalo Roam": O2 Academy, Liverpool

17/10/15 ICW "Road To Fear & Loathing Tour – Appetite For Destruction": UAE, Norwich

17/10/15 Future Shock Wrestling "Underground": Longfield Suite, Prestwich

17/10/15 All Star Wrestling: Butlins, Bognor Regis

17/10/15 HCW: Civic Centre, Warminster

17/10/15 KSW: Quarry Sports & Social Club, Birmingham

17/10/15 LPW: "Nemesis": Harehill Working Mens Club, Leeds

17/10/15 DOA "High Voltage": Westbury Social Club, Bury St Edmunds

18/10/15 PROGRESS Wrestling: Electric Ballroom, Camden

18/10/15 ICW "Road To Fear & Loathing Tour – When The Sun Goes Down": O2 Academy, Sheffield

23/10/15 EBW: Newton Memorial Hall, Cheltenham

23/10/15 Welsh Wrestling: Congress Theatre, Cwmbran

23/10/15 HOP:E "Evolution 26": Forest Town Arena, Mansfield

24/10/15 IRONFIST "Spooky Spectacular": Richmond Place Club, Hereford

24/10/15 RWA: Grangeway Community Centre, Runcorn

24/10/15 Wrestling.ie: Theatre Royal, Waterford City

24/10/15 All Star Wrestling: Butlins, Bognor Regis

24/10/15 All Star Wrestling: Butlins, Skegness

24/10/15 PBW: Greenock Town Hall, Cathcart

24/10/15 PEW: Wotton Hall, Gloucester

24/10/15 Welsh Wrestling: Miners' Institute, Blackwood

24/10/15 4FW: Hawkinge Community Centre, Folkestone

24/10/15 Infinite Promotions: The Dome, Liverpool

24/10/15 WZW "Halloween Hijinx": Ferryhill Community Centre, Ferryhill

24/10/15 CHAOS "CHAOS 16": Hanham Community Centre, Bristol

24/10/15 SCW: St. Aldhelms Centre, Poole

25/10/15 All Star Wrestling: Butlins, Minehead

26/10/15 BWP "Halloween Spooktacular": Ffrith Beach Arena, Prestatyn

27/10/15 All Star Wrestling: Butlins, Bognor Regis

28/10/15 All Star Wrestling: Butlins, Minehead

29/10/15 All Star Wrestling: Butlins, Skegness

30/10/15 PCW "Fright Night": EVOQUE, Preston

30/10/15 HCW "Octoberfest": Wolverley Sports & Social Club, Kidderminster

30/10/15 Welsh Wrestling: Lyric Theatre, Carmarthen

30/10/15 4FW: The Laverton, Westbury

30/10/15 ICW "Road To Fear & Loathing Tour – Live Forever": Manchester Academy 2

31/10/15 ICW "Road To Fear & Loathing Tour – Imaginationland": O2 Academy, Birmingham

31/10/15 All Star Wrestling: Butlins, Bognor Regis

31/10/15 All Star Wrestling: Butlins, Skegness

31/10/15 4FW "WrestleWAR": Stratton Leisure Centre, Swindon

31/10/15 SWE "Uprising": Ardler Complex, Dundee

01/11/15 Southside Wrestling "Young Tigers Cup": Commemoration Hall, Huntingdon

01/11/15 Phoenix Events "Tickled Pink": Parklands Social Club, Doncaster

01/11/15 ICW "Road To Fear & Loathing Tour – Get My Rocks Off": Rock City, Nottingham

ALL EVENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

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THE TV LOUNGE

WRESTLING ROUND-UP

In the classic pro wrestling angle, it was Sting hiding in the box that was supposed to house Seth Rollins' statue



**MISSED WWE, TNA, AND ROH THIS MONTH?
DON'T WORRY, WE'VE GOT YOU COVERED WITH
OUR LOOK AT *RAW*, *SMACKDOWN*, *MAIN EVENT*,
NXT, *IMPACT* WRESTLING, AND *ROH* ON *SINCLAIR*...**

In the fallout from *SummerSlam*, WWE World heavyweight and U.S. champion Seth Rollins was on a quest to take his place amongst the greats in wrestling history. Rollins, revelling in his victory over John Cena, gloated about his momentum to The Authority, and demanded to see the statue that Triple-H and Stephanie McMahon had promised him. On the August 24 *Raw*, Triple-H therefore took Rollins on a short tour of WWE Headquarters in Stamford, showing him statues of Andre The Giant, Bruno Sammartino and The Ultimate Warrior. Later that same show, the statue of Rollins was to be unveiled during a show-closing in-ring segment. With a box surrounding the statue, Triple-H, Stephanie and Rollins all prepared to celebrate as they looked on, but when the box was raised, it revealed only Sting. "The Vigilante" cleared the ring of Rollins, and immediately motioned that he had his eyes on the WWE title, with the match quickly being made for September 20's *Night Of Champions*.

To further build this bout, the angle centred around Sting stealing Rollins' statue, with the champion demanding it be returned. Rollins – the petulant crybaby – was pinned by Ryback on the September 7 *Raw* after a Sting distraction came via the TitanTron, and also teamed with The New Day to lose to John Cena and The Prime Time Players in that show's main event. In the closing scene, Sting revealed that he had Rollins' statue backstage, but he then had it crushed in a trash compactor.

With every title being defended at *Night Of Champions*, Rollins was also forced to put

the U.S. belt on the line against John Cena. The latter gained a measure of revenge on talk show host Jon Stewart on August 24, after Stewart had cost him a victory with his interference at *SummerSlam*. Cena hit Stewart with the Attitude Adjustment, after Stewart had claimed he had prevented Cena from winning the WWE World heavyweight title because he didn't want him to equal Ric Flair's championship record.

The personal issue between Brock Lesnar and The Undertaker was placed on the back-burner following *SummerSlam*. Lesnar and Paul Heyman appeared on August 24's *Raw*, bemoaning Lesnar's loss and vowing to avenge it. They demanded The Undertaker face Lesnar right there and then, but instead, Bo Dallas came out and was predictably destroyed in seconds. It's widely believed that Lesnar will face The Undertaker in a *WrestleMania* re-match at next year's big show in Dallas.

The tag team division in WWE heated up with the surprise full-time return of The Dudley Boyz, also on August 24. WWE Tag Team champions The New Day defeated The Lucha Dragons on that show, only for the Dudleys to ruin their celebrations, with Bubba Ray and D-Von combining to 3D Xavier Woods, before putting him through a table. The Dudleys have quickly risen through the ranks, defeating The Ascension on the August 27 *Smackdown*, The New Day in a non-title match on the August 31 *Raw*, and Los Matadores on the September 7 *Raw*. The latter bout included an apparent heel turn by Los Matadores, who blamed their loss on mascot El Torito and beat him up.

For their part, The New Day has been hysterical of late, with Xavier Woods playing a trombone before, during and after the team's matches, and doing comedic shtick in a manner similar to Edge and Christian. Speaking of whom, the Canadian "brothers" made a cameo appearance backstage on the September 7 *Raw*. They were in town to tape an episode of the WWE Network's *Stone Cold Podcast*, but first confronted Seth Rollins backstage, reminding him of his attack on "The Rated-R Superstar" the previous year. Rollins left the scene quickly, leaving The New Day and Edge and Christian to swap trombone and kazoo-based banter.

A New Wyatt Family member debuted on August 24: the enormous Braun Strowman. During a Roman Reigns and Dean Ambrose versus Bray Wyatt and Luke Harper bout, the lights went out, with Strowman appearing in the ring after they came back on. He then destroyed the babyfaces after no-selling their offence. WWE has put over Strowman as an unstoppable monster, although a singles match that pitted the very green newcomer against Ambrose on the following week's *Raw* was less well-received. At his experience level, it will be a struggle to get him over.

The interminable Rusev and Summer Rae versus Dolph Ziggler and Lana feud took a dramatic soap opera-style twist on the August 31 *Raw*, when Summer Rae was seen exiting Ziggler's dressing room with a smile on her face. A flustered Ziggler, with a towel barely around his waist, swiftly followed her, telling her to stay out. This led

WRESTLING ROUND-UP

The New Day have been an absolute hoot on Raw this month



to tension between Ziggler and Lana, who was unwittingly portrayed as neurotic in not accepting her boyfriend's explanation that Rae had sneaked in uninvited. A Miz TV segment on the September 3 *Smackdown* saw Rae bring up that she had smooched with Ziggler during his long-forgotten feud with Fandango in June 2014. On the September 7 *Raw*, Ziggler superkicked Rusev, after Rae had apologised to the Bulgarian, and claimed that Ziggler had tried to seduce her, which Dolph denied.

Charlotte became the number one contender to Nikki Bella's WWE Divas title when she won a Beat the Clock Challenge on August 31. Charlotte beat Brie Bella in 1:40, after Becky Lynch had defeated Alicia Fox in 3:21, and before Paige failed to best Sasha Banks in the requisite time.

The **NXT** brand presented a highly successful *Takeover: Brooklyn* show on August 22, the night before *SummerSlam*. In results from the card, Jushin "Thunder" Liger defeated Tyler Breeze in an entertaining contest; The Vaudevillains (with Blue Pants in their corner) beat Blake and Murphy (with Alexa Bliss) in a heated match; Apollo Crews made his **NXT** debut, defeating Tye Dillenger in an impressive squash; and Samoa Joe choked out Baron Corbin. In a tremendous semi-main event, Bayley won the **NXT** Women's title, defeating Sasha Banks in a memorable 18-minute encounter. Afterwards, Bayley and Banks embraced, and Charlotte and Becky Lynch hit the ring to congratulate the new champion. In the main event, Finn Balor beat Kevin Owens to retain the **NXT** title in a thrilling Ladder match.

Matches taped before *Takeover: Brooklyn* went live on the WWE Network aired during a 90-minute special on August 26, with Enzo Amore, Colin Cassaday and The Hype Bros. defeating The Mechanics, Chad Gable and Jason Jordan; Eva Marie beating Carmella; Bull Dempsey pinning Elias Samson; and Emma surprisingly winning a four-way over Becky Lynch, Dana Brooke and Charlotte.

The angle involving Dolph Ziggler and Lana has exceeded expectations by actually getting worse



The main focus of the weekly **NXT** show since then has been the Dusty Rhodes Tag Team Classic. This 16-team tournament will culminate with the semi-finals and final taking place on the October 7 Network special, on which Bayley and Sasha Banks will also rematch. In results from the Dusty Rhodes Tag Team Classic so far, Baron Corbin and Rhyno beat The Ascension; Chad Gable and Jason Jordan defeated Solomon Crowe and Neville; Johnny Gargano and Tommaso Ciampa went over Tyler Breeze and Bull Dempsey; and Finn Balor and Samoa Joe beat The Lucha Dragons.

A Machiavellian plot leading to Global Force Wrestling's hostile takeover of TNA was the main focus of **Impact Wrestling** this month. Things started innocently enough, with GFW owner Jeff Jarrett being placed in a temporary authority role by a trusting Dixie Carter, after Bully Ray was knocked out by a mysterious backstage attacker and sent packing back to Dudleyville. After an eventful August 19 show in which Jarrett forced TNA World champion Ethan Carter III to defend his title against GFW roster member and King of the Mountain champion PJ Black, Jarrett angled for permanent TNA power, suggesting to Dixie that he take on this authority role on a full-time basis.

The following's week's show had Dixie on the verge of appointing Jarrett permanently, when she was interrupted by Drew Galloway. The Scot had also been laid out by a mystery assailant in previous weeks, and he announced that video footage had recorded the attacker fleeing in a rental car registered in Jarrett's name. Jarrett was appalled by the accusation that he had anything to do with the attacks, but his wife, Karen, suddenly revealed that she was the one behind them, and that she had done it to help Jarrett reclaim what was rightfully his: the entire TNA promotion. Quickly, the GFW roster hit the ring and attacked Galloway, and when Rockstar Spud and The Wolves attempted to make the save, they were also beaten down.

The September 2 programme began with the Jarretts and their GFW faction in the ring, recapping recent events. It was revealed that Chris "The Adonis" Mordetzky (Chris Masters) had laid out Bully Ray and Drew Galloway. Jarrett declared that a hostile takeover of TNA was underway, and Mordetzky challenged anyone to take him on. Bobby Lashley accepted that challenge, with the pair wrestling to a disqualification victory for Lashley, when the GFW crew beat him down.

GFW gained an upper hand on TNA when Karen Jarrett cashed in absent GFW roster

"The New Day have been hysterical of late, with Xavier Woods playing a trombone before, during and after matches, doing comedic shtick in a manner similar to Edge and Christian"

WRESTLING ROUND-UP

member Magnus' Feast or Fired briefcase, which entitled him to a TNA Tag Team title shot. Karen appointed Brian Myers (formerly Curt Hawkins) and Trevor Lee as the challengers to The Wolves, with Myers and Lee surprisingly winning the belts. Their reign didn't last long, however, as Davey Richards and Eddie Edwards regained the titles on the following week's show. TNA got some revenge later on September 2, when Bobby Roode defeated PJ Black to win the King of the Mountain championship.

With both sides battling for supremacy, Jeff Jarrett and Dixie Carter had an in-ring summit. After exchanging insults, it was agreed that the two sides, TNA and GFW, would face off in a four-on-four Lethal Lockdown Cage match on September 16, after which the winning team would take full control of TNA. The following week, Chris Mordetzky beat Drew Galloway to win the initial advantage in the match, when Eric Young helped Mordetzky to victory, defecting to GFW as a result.

Ethan Carter III remains TNA World champion, and is engaged in a feud with Matt Hardy. Carter beat Hardy on September 2, and as per the pre-match stipulation, Jeff Hardy has become EC3's personal assistant. Naturally, Carter abused the now subservient "Jeffrey" on the following week's show, en route to EC3 and bodyguard Tyrus' victory over Matt Hardy and Rockstar Spud. The storyline, however, is not building to an EC3 versus Jeff Hardy match just yet, but rather a TNA World title defence against Drew Galloway. The latter defeated Eli Drake in decisive fashion on August 19, effectively ending their feud.

Gail Kim defeated Jade and Marti Bell in a one-on-two Handicap Cage match, also on August 19. A Brooke Tessmacher versus Velvet Sky match on the following week's show was interrupted by The Dollhouse, as Rebel returned, turned heel, and joined Taryn Terrell's group. A confrontation between Velvet Sky and The Dollhouse on September 2 saw Angelina Love and Madison Rayne make the save, reuniting The Beautiful People. Brooke Tessmacher defeated Gail Kim via disqualification on September 9, when GFW's Lei'D Tapa interfered, only to be counteracted by the returning Awesome Kong.

In one of the most ludicrous match stipulations in years, Eric Young defeated Chris Melendez on August 26 to "win possession" of Melendez' prosthetic leg.

The build towards ROH's *All Star Extravaganza* on September 18 was the focus of this month's **ROH On Sinclair**.

After Matt Hardy lost to EC3, brother Jeff became the TNA champion's assistant



Colby Corino got involved in Jay Briscoe's business on September 2



© SCOTT FINKELSTEIN

Jay Lethal remains ROH World and TV champion, continuing to defend both belts against a variety of challengers. He retained his TV title against Hanson in a hard-fought match on September 2, and defended the World title against Roderick Strong a week later. At *All Star Extravaganza*, Lethal put his World title up against Kyle O'Reilly, while in a separate singles match earlier in the show, he defended his TV title against Bobby Fish.

The ROH tag team division has heated up of late. The Young Bucks defeated Rocky Romero and Trent Barreta on August 19, only to be jumped by The Addiction and Chris Sabin after the match. The dastardly trio tied Matt Jackson to the ropes and beat him down, before hitting the IndyTaker (spike Tombstone piledriver) on his brother, Nick. On August 26, The Addiction beat the old Future Shock team of Adam Cole and

Kyle O'Reilly, when The Kingdom interfered and cost Future Shock the bout. A post-match brawl ensued, with both Chris Sabin and Bobby Fish getting involved, before The Young Bucks ran in for revenge on The Addiction. Matters escalated on September 9, when The Kingdom interfered in an Addiction versus Young Bucks ROH Tag Team title match, costing The Bucks the match. ROH matchmaker Nigel McGuinness was having none of the shenanigans, and booked The Addiction, The Kingdom and The Young Bucks in a Triple Threat match for the ROH Tag Team titles for September 18.

Jay Briscoe was challenged to a match by Adam Page on September 2, which ended with Briscoe winning via disqualification when Colby Corino interfered, and Page used a chair on the former ROH champion. His brother, Mark Briscoe, made the save.

Shows covered from August 17 to September 11

RATINGS REVIEW

U.S. TV ratings for *Raw* remained poor this month, with one show dipping to an 18-year low. The August 17 broadcast scored a 2.73 rating (3.78m viewers); August 24 dipped slightly to a 2.72 rating (3.72m viewers); August 31 scored a similar 2.73 rating (3.89m viewers); and September 7 fell to a 2.44 rating (3.37m viewers), making it the least-watched *Raw* on a non-holiday Monday for over 18 years.

***Smackdown* has also declined, after months of being consistently in the 1.8-2.0 range. The August 20 programme drew a 1.7 rating (2.43m viewers); August 27 dipped to a 1.62 rating (2.2m viewers); September 3 drew a 1.42 rating (1.98m viewers), the second-lowest *Smackdown* rating in the show's 16-year history (above only a July**

4, 2014 broadcast that drew a 1.37 rating); and September 10 rose slightly to a 1.54 rating (2.0m viewers).

U.S. TV viewership for *Impact Wrestling* on Destination America has risen over the past month. The August 19 broadcasts drew a total of 396,000 viewers; August 26 declined to 362,000 viewers; September 2 increased to 420,000 viewers; and September 9 increased further to a total of 449,000 viewers, TNA's best ratings in two months.

The ROH numbers on Destination America have declined, however. The August 19 show garnered 145,000 viewers; August 26 increased slightly to 149,000; September 2 fell to 144,000; and September 9 declined to 138,000 viewers, the lowest ROH viewership on the station to date.

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WRESTLING ROUND-UP

DRAGON GATE SUMMER ADVENTURE TAG LEAGUE

With the landscape continuing to change in Dragon Gate, September 9's Korakuen Hall show was an important one in terms of hammering home storylines and getting across character directions for the future.

The show, as part of the Summer Adventure Tag League, was headlined by three tournament matches but also featured a key singles bout between former teammates T-Hawk and Eita. It was a first-time meeting between two young stars who have the future of the company on their shoulders. Both have had trouble connecting with the fans, but Eita – here in his first big match since turning heel – was able to really shine with a more aggressive attitude. For his part, T-Hawk is very good from a technical and athletic standpoint, but struggles to show the necessary fire at times. He had glimpses of it here, and by the end of the match had the crowd's support. The action was picking up before a non-finish caused by Eita's interfering new buddies, Cyber Kong and Kotoka.

Of the three tournament matches, the main event pitting Naruki Doi and YAMATO against

the reunited KneSuka (K-Ness and Jimmy Susumu) was the best. Technically on-point from start to finish, with a clear heel/face dynamic, it was a match in which there was barely a fault, and after a scintillating series of near-falls, Doi used his V9 Clutch (somersault cradle) to get the flash pin.

CIMA and Gamma were on the losing end of a fun encounter against Don Fujii and Ryo Saito, who have taken on Fujii's old sumo gimmick for the Tag League. There was lots of sumo comedy and spots here, before Saito used a whacky new top-rope splash to get the win. The masked man duo of Dragon Kid and Flamita also took on BxB Hulk and Kzy in a solid match in which Kzy stood out before he got the win with a Skayde Schoolboy.

The rest of the card featured plenty of good storyline progression, such as in the rift between Mr. QuuQuu Naoki Tanizaki Toyonaka Dolphin and the rest of The Jimmys, not to mention the main story in the company, the new heel personality of Open The Dream Gate champion Shingo Takagi, who beat the tar out of Shachihoko BOY and ripped off his mask.



© JAE CHURCH

1. Cyber Kong caused a frustrating non-finish in the bout between Eita and T-Hawk

RESULTS Masaaki Mochizuki, Big R Shimizu & Yosuke Santa Maria def. The Jimmys (Pinfall / 10:12) ■ BxB Hulk & Kzy def. Dragon Kid & Flamita (Pinfall / 14:18) ■ Eita went to a no-contest with T-Hawk (11:54) ■ Don Fujii & Ryo "Jimmy" Saito def. CIMA & Gamma (Pinfall / 14:37) ■ Shingo Takagi, Cyber Kong & Kotoka def. Monster Express (Pinfall / 17:50) ■ Naruki Doi & YAMATO def. KneSuka (Pinfall / 17:04)

SHINE WRESTLING SHINE 29

September 4's SHINE 29 proved to be a sea change for "AK47" Allysin Kay, though not in the way she intended. Her impressive string of victories earned her a title shot against SHINE title-holder Santana Garrett, but despite her usual stellar performance, Kay was defeated in a great main event when Garrett struck a reverse hurricanrana and bridged for the pin.

The background to Kay's challenge saw So Cal Val plot a merger between Valkyrie and Valifornia, which Kay resisted. Following the match, Val revealed that the merger to create VALkyrie had gone ahead behind Kay's back, and Kay reacted by taking out nearly all the members and turning on manager April Hunter with a Stunner. This gives Kay a fresh slate of future opponents, and keeps her strong despite the main event loss.

Vanessa Kraven continued her tear through SHINE, as "The Mountain" took out Athena in a good match with a sit-out powerbomb. Following the contest, Kraven was confronted by Jessicka Havok, who had earlier defeated LuFisto in a battle of top women's indy grapplers. Havok demanded a re-match from SHINE 28, when Kraven defeated her, but Kraven claimed she was done with Havok. Athena tried to play peacemaker, but ate a Havok chokeslam for her troubles.

Leva Bates and Mia Yim put their issues from SHINE 28 behind them, as The Lucha Sisters

reunited to defeat Andrea and Jayme Jameson in a fun, if slightly too long encounter. Afterwards, Daffney's mystery Iron Maidens team re-emerged, only for SHINE executive Lexie Fyfe to declare that they had not been contracted to compete for the group, thus threatening Daffney with a suspension.

Leah Von Dutch continued her crusade against Legendary by submitting Brandi Wine with the Dutch Clutch (Cobra Clutch), but was then attacked by Wine's fellow Legendary members Malia Hosaka and Thunderkitty. Ivelisse Velez and Amanda Rodriguez made the save as an act of revenge for Legendary taking out La Rosa Negra at SHINE 28, and proceeded to defeat Hosaka and Thunderkitty in a subsequent match.

In other action, SHINE Tag Team champion Cherry Bomb fell to Taylor Made due to a distraction by April Hunter; Su Yung initially claimed victory over Luscious Latasha, although the decision was reversed after Yung continued the attack her after the bell; and thanks to hidden interference by Daffney, "Crazy" Mary Dobson earned a win over Miss Rachel.

RESULTS Crazy Mary Dobson (w/Daffney) def. Miss Rachel (Pinfall / 06:15) ■ Taylor Made (w/April Hunter) def. Cherry Bomb (Pinfall / 13:17) ■ Lucha Sisters (Leva Bates & Mia Yim) def. Valifornia (Andrea & Jayme Jameson) (w/So Cal Val) (Pinfall / 14:15) ■ Luscious Latasha def. Su Yung (w/April Hunter) (Disqualification / 03:31) ■ Jessicka Havok def. LuFisto (Pinfall / 14:26) ■ Leah Von Dutch def. Brandi Wine (w/Leilani Kai) (Submission / 08:35) ■ Amanda Rodriguez & Ivelisse Velez def. Malia Hosaka & Thunderkitty (w/Leilani Kai) (Pinfall / 07:51) ■ Vanessa Kraven def. Athena (Pinfall / 09:52) ■ Santana Garrett def. Allysin Kay (w/April Hunter) (Pinfall / 14:44 / SHINE championship)



© TABERCIL

1. Leah Von Dutch's feud with Legendary continued at SHINE 29



UFC 191 JOHNSON VS. DODSON 2

If you want a vision of Demetrious Johnson as UFC flyweight champion, imagine someone sighing, forever.

FSM looked in-depth at the problems with his reign following *UFC 186*, and this *UFC 191* defence was exactly the same: he came in, danced around somebody who would be lucky to make it onto the main card if he fought in any other division, and proceeded to tell everyone that was sentient enough to be bored that they were stupid.

This fight was meant to be different, as after all, John Dodson was the last man to “pose a real challenge” to Johnson. Of course, “Mighty Mouse” had dominated the first meeting, too, but a couple of flash knockdowns and a reasonably entertaining title match goes a long way in the desert that is the 125lb division. On September 5, Johnson was again too wily for the plucky challenger, handily beating him for a unanimous decision victory.

And so it is underscored: it’s just too easy for Johnson to evade being hit in a fight arena as big as the Octagon.

It’s getting to the point that the only way to enjoy Johnson’s bouts is to pretend that they’re some elaborate form of performance art; just as The Producers tried to present the worst show in Broadway history, he’s trying to be the sport’s most tedious ever titlist. Admittedly, that analogy breaks down given that *Springtime For Hitler* was a huge commercial success, whereas the only records Johnson breaks are those of the lowest live gates in arena history.

Johnson was boring last year on Labor Day weekend, but the likes of Conor McGregor, Donald Cerrone, Yoel Romero, Cat Zingano and Dominick Cruz put on a good show underneath him. *UFC 191* was not as fortunate as *UFC 178*, as by and large the pay-per-view bouts were decidedly poor.

HEAVYWEIGHT HUFF AND PUFF

The co-main event summed up everything that was bad with *UFC 191*. Both Andrei Arlovski and Demetrious Johnson def. John Dodson (Decision [unanimous] / R5 / 5:00)

1. On a pay-per-view with few positives, Paige VanZant gained more than most 2. Demetrious Johnson vs. John Dodson was another boring outing for the champ 3. Sunderland’s Ross Pearson got a much-needed win over Paul Felder on the undercard

Frank Mir were matched up after winning two of the most dramatic, all-action slugfests fans had seen this year. However, they’re both known as counter-punchers – something that’s become more pronounced as Mir has struggled with his weight and Arlovski has had to scramble to protect his delicate chin. That means that while they have all the tools to win a brawl should their opponent come at them – as both Travis Browne and Todd Duffee did – they are highly unlikely to take the initiative themselves. Because of this, their fight repeatedly stalled, with both men spending too long doing nothing in the clinch.

Likewise, Anthony Johnson and Jimi Manuwa failed to deliver the fireworks expected. Manuwa was coming back from a knee injury and seemed tentative throughout, while Johnson decided to use his wrestling to exploit the Brit’s stereotypical grappling deficiencies. The fight did, however, have a great knockout, as Johnson connected with a cracking right hook that crossed Manuwa’s eyes.

Of all the main card fighters, Paige VanZant was the most impressive. She’s not the most polished performer, which is unsurprising considering she’s just 21, but she is persistent and has a ton of energy. She swarmed all over Alex Chambers, constantly overwhelming her with volume punching, securing a well-deserved finish with an armbar.

The jewel of the show was to be found on the prelims, as John Lineker versus Francisco Rivera was the most exciting fight in bantamweight history. They tore into each other in a turbo-charged version of the first Korean Zombie versus Leonard Garcia bout. In a division drowning in the ridiculous amount of space around the fighters, Lineker and Rivera stood face to face and hit out as hard as they could. Lineker won the firefight, knocking Rivera down and quickly applying a guillotine for the submission.

UFC 191 show was by no means a must-see card, but you should go out of your way to watch this spectacular encounter.

RESULTS Joaquin Silva def. Nazareno Malegarie (Decision [split] / R3 / 5:00)
■ Joe Riggs def. Ron Stallings (DQ [illegal upkick] / R2 / 2:28) ■ Tiago Trator def. Clay Collard (Decision [split] / R2 / 4:58)
■ Raquel Pennington def. Jessica Andrade (Submission [rear-naked choke] / R2 / 4:58) ■ John Lineker def. Francisco Rivera (Submission [guillotine choke] / R1 / 2:08)
■ Ross Pearson def. Paul Felder (Decision [split] / R3 / 5:00) ■ Paige VanZant def. Alex Chambers (Submission [armbar] / R3 / 1:01) ■ Corey Anderson def. Jan Blachowicz (Decision [unanimous] / R3 / 5:00) ■ Anthony Johnson def. Jimi Manuwa (Knockout [punches] / R2 / 0:28) ■ Andrei Arlovski def. Frank Mir (Decision [unanimous] / R3 / 5:00) ■ Demetrious Johnson def. John Dodson (Decision [unanimous] / R5 / 5:00)

@Giizelitha I'm watching SummerSlam again and I just noticed there's a sign that says "Bros before Buzzards" lol #SummerSlam #WWE

WRESTLING ROUND-UP



WWE SUMMERSLAM 2015

The 2015 *SummerSlam*, the second of three straight sold-out WWE events emanating from Brooklyn's Barclays Centre, was a very strong in-ring show that will be remembered more for some very unusual and risky booking decisions.

The Undertaker used his Hell's Gate gogoplata to defeat a defiant Brock Lesnar, who instead of submitting passed out with his middle finger extended in the face of "The Deadman". Moments earlier, a Brock kimura had forced The Undertaker to tap, which led to the timekeeper ringing the bell. Referee Charles Robinson had not called for it, however, having missed the tap due to being focused on the arm Lesnar was trying to break, and during the commotion of the restart, The Undertaker hit Lesnar with a low-blow, which led to the finish. This was an interesting way to beat Lesnar while retaining his aura of invincibility, yet furthering the storyline of an ailing and desperate Undertaker who'll take any advantage to win.

SummerSlam host Jon Stewart attacked John Cena with a chair to cost him his United States championship in a Title versus Title match against WWE World heavyweight champion Seth Rollins. Stewart teased attacking Rollins, whom he has had issues with in the past, before hitting Cena in the gut with the chair, setting up the match-ending Pedigree. The bout itself was great, easily the best of Rollins' shaky title run, and another good match in what has been a banner 2015 for Cena. Rollins worked as hard and fast as any WWE performer in recent memory, in a match where you finally felt he got to showcase all of his skills.

Team PCB defeated Team BAD and Team Bella in another disappointing match in the ongoing Divas revolution. This was the worst match on the show - a nondescript mess of a three-way Elimination tag, which featured very little of Sasha Banks, who one night earlier was the star of the show on the *NXT TakeOver* special in the same building. This "revolution" has accomplished nothing in terms

of getting any of the 9 women involved over more than they were before, nor has it upped the standing of women in WWE in any discernible way.

The show had two other title bouts. The New Day won the WWE Tag Team titles back from The Prime Time Players in an exciting four-way that also included The Lucha Dragons and Los Matadores. Kofi Kingston stole the pin from Titus O'Neil after O'Neil had hit the Clash of the Titus on Fernando.

In a shockingly good match considering the uninspiring build, Ryback retained the Intercontinental title in a three-way over Big Show and The Miz. This encounter was short but all-action, with Ryback tossing Big Show over the top rope and pinning The Miz after the giant had previously knocked Miz out with the KO punch.

BIG NIGHT HIGHLIGHT

The Match of the Night, which is saying a lot since this show was deep with entertaining matches, was the Kevin Owens win over Cesaro. The Swiss grappler was great here - the highlight being a gorgeous twisting tornillo dive - before Owens put him away with a second-rope Fisherman's suplex, followed by his patented pop-up powerbomb. This was hard-hitting and fast-paced pro wrestling, befitting of such a prestigious card.

The opener saw Sheamus hit a Brogue Kick to win the latest match in a seemingly never-ending rivalry with Randy Orton. Rusev and Dolph Ziggler had a short, intense brawl that was developing into a good match before a anticlimactic double count-out finish. Roman Reigns, who was booed mightily, teamed with Dean Ambrose to defeat Bray Wyatt and Luke Harper in a match that was noticeably one-sided in favour of the victors. Bray took the Dirty Deeds and the Reigns spear for the pinfall.

Actor Stephen Amell acquitted himself very well, hardly looking out of place before Neville hit the Red Arrow on King Barrett to pick up the win for the duo over Barrett and Stardust.



1. The Undertaker and Brock Lesnar share a laugh in a moment that went viral **2.** Seth Rollins put in an unbelievable performance against John Cena in the Title vs. Title match **3.** Cesaro shows immense strength to lift Kevin Owens into a gutwrench suplex

RESULTS Sheamus def. Randy Orton (Pinfall / 12:46) ■ The New Day def. The Prime Time Players, Los Matadores & The Lucha Dragons (Pinfall / 11:22 / Four-way for the WWE Tag Team titles) ■ Dolph Ziggler and Rusev fought to a double count-out (11:50) ■ Stephen Amell & Neville def. Stardust & King Barrett (Pinfall / 7:36) ■ Ryback def. The Miz & Big Show (Pinfall / 5:34 / Three-way for the WWE Intercontinental title) ■ Roman Reigns & Dean Ambrose def. Bray Wyatt & Luke Harper (Pinfall / 10:56) ■ Seth Rollins def. John Cena (Pinfall / 19:27 / Winner takes all match for the WWE World heavyweight & U.S. titles) ■ Team PCB def. Team Bella, Team BAD (15:18 / Three-way Elimination match) ■ Kevin Owens def. Cesaro (Pinfall / 14:21) ■ The Undertaker def. Brock Lesnar (Submission [Hell's Gate] / 20:04)

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SAYWHAT?!

One of the great things about pro wrestling is that there are so many different styles, and so many different opinions. Voice your thoughts on the sport we love via e-mail, Facebook, and Twitter.

FACE TO FACEBOOK

IS MONEY IN THE BANK A WASTED INVESTMENT?

Angel Crow: I respect Sheamus as a very capable wrestler, however I cannot understand WWE giving him the Money in the Bank briefcase. Every time I think about him cashing in, I think about how boring WWE is going to be with him as champion. I'd love for him to put the MITB on the line against Cesaro, who wins.



Michael Dodd: The function of the briefcase has been lost somewhat. It's meant to be an indication of an up-and-comer soon getting a main event shot, but now it's more like a useless mid-card title.

James Yull: They'll probably give him a run when the new *Turtles* movie comes out. He'll take the belt to all his interviews, which is great publicity.

Christopher Murphy: Well, John Cena and Damien Sandow both lost when they cashed in. So, Sheamus will be the third!

BLAME IT ON THE BOOGIEY

Annelise Freedman: What are your thoughts on The Boogeyman? He's a very limited wrestler, but seems to portray his role well. Do you think there's a place for him in 2015?

Michael Campbell: I felt bad for him at the time. He was so out of time and out of place when he was introduced. Terrible wrestler, too – his matches were the pits. But he was a committed performer who went all-out playing the gimmick. Nowadays he'd be fun for a one-off in the Rumble or a backstage skit at best.

Darren Bowen: Yes, I think so. I think WWE needs a ridiculous character to break things up. The Boogeyman was all shades of ridiculous, and kind of on the right side of scary, too.

Danny Farrell: I still have a soft spot for all the comic book-type characters – I guess that comes from growing up in the 1980s. I agree, he was out of place and time, but I found him fun to watch. He would make a good occasional appearance, just for a little pop.

Simon Wight: I think it would be hard to introduce the "wacky" character nowadays, though. The perception of wrestling as realistic characters with shades of grey is just so prevalent as the standard. That means any wacky character would have a short-term shelf-life, and would maybe be a death knell to a career.



Bayley captured the NXT Women's title from Sasha Banks in an incredible match at TakeOver: Brooklyn

TWITTER TALK

WWE ROCKS THE BARCLAYS CENTRE

@TRK485 It's crazily awesome Liger can move like he does at 50 years old and after competing at such a high level for over 25 years.

@TheEricYoung Just watched #NXTBrooklyn @SashaBanksWWE vs @itsBayleyWWE What a wonderful piece of business. Congrats to both!!! #respect

@RealPaigeWWE Congratulations to one of the best people I know. So much heart and passion for this business. @itsBayleyWWE new NXT Women's champion.

@itsBayleyWWE I would like to thank all of you. Your support and appreciation for #NXTTakeOver warms my heart. Somebody pinch me...

@TheTomNix Owens and Balor are two of the best wrestlers alive and they have to be sweating that they have to follow this. #bayleyVSsasha #NXTTakeOver

@WrestlingLAD SummerSlam 2013 HHH and Orton screw Bryan! SummerSlam 2014 Nikki screws Brie! SummerSlam 2015 Jon Stewart screws Cena! #SummerSlam

@Flash_Morgan If Cena had beaten Rollins with the Figure Four he definitely would have received 20-30% more hate mail than usual #SummerSlam

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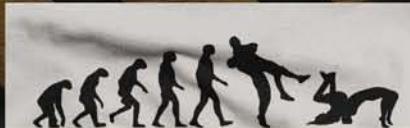
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Zack Sabre Jr (Japan)

'I couldn't be happier that Johnny Moss is opening a wrestling school! He had a huge influence on my progression at Hammerlock Wrestling'.



Fergal Devitt/Fin Balor (WWE)

'Johnny Moss has been one of the men that has influenced me the most in my career, he continues to give me diet and training advise to this day. He is a true leader and I have no doubt his school will be breeding ground for the next generation of British talent. I'm looking forward to doing some training again with Johnny and meeting all the team'

VIDEO VAULT

FSM brings you some of the best pro wrestling videos from around the web



WWE Tough Enough finale 2015

Reality TV show *Tough Enough* hasn't always been the most critically-acclaimed of WWE concepts. The latest season has drawn criticism particularly for how it's egregiously led audiences to vote for its favourites, but that notwithstanding, the entire finale is available to enjoy on YouTube. In addition to the winners being announced, there's a great atmosphere to the broadcast that makes it worth checking out. In fact, the final episode feels more like a wrestling show than the previous 9 put together!

tinyurl.com/ToughEnoughFinale

NXT Takeover: Brooklyn – The Defining Moments

Many **FSM** readers will agree that NXT is one of the best things going in the world of pro wrestling right now. The show has fine matches and great character development on a weekly basis, and the *Takeover* specials have provided Match of the Year candidates throughout 2015. One such example came on August 22, and from Samoa Joe's arrival, to Finn Balor's title defence, there's a lot to enjoy in this highlights package.



tinyurl.com/NXTTakeover



Before She Was "The Boss"

Cutting her teeth on the North American independent circuit, Sasha Banks wasn't yet known as "The Boss". Just a few short years ago, she was Mercedes KV, and was every bit as comfortable mixing it up with the guys as she was the girls, as this match from Beyond Wrestling clearly shows. Currently a major part of the Divas revolution, Banks is one of the most exciting performers in WWE, male or female.

tinyurl.com/SashaYoung

Bill Apter's History of Wrestling Magazines

So influential a figure is **FSM**'s Bill Apter that wrestling magazines were at one point commonly referred to as "Apter mags". Last year, WWE announced that it was shutting down its magazine division, and as if that wasn't enough, the long-running UK publication, Power Slam, also closed its doors. In this video, the legendary Apter gives his opinion on the changing face of the wrestling magazine, and discusses **FSM**.



tinyurl.com/BillApter

Jarrett vs. Sting vs. Foley vs. Angle

Nowadays, TNA is a much different promotion to the one that fans remember from just a couple of years ago, and going back even further, the company is virtually unrecognisable from the one visible in this footage. The event was *Sacrifice 2009*, where Jeff Jarrett met Mick Foley, Sting and Kurt Angle in a four-way encounter. The star power in this one is a sobering reminder of how far TNA has fallen in those stakes.



©BRIAN WRIGHT

tinyurl.com/Sacrifice2009

tinyurl.com/wXwEnglish

wXw Shotgun #219

History is made in this video, as German promotion wXw presents its first English language episode, hosted by Rico Bushido and featuring commentary by **FSM**'s own Alan Cunihan. Credit where credit is due to wXw for going the extra mile to make it as easy as possible for English-speaking viewers to enjoy their show; now, fans across the globe will be more likely to check out some of the finest European wrestling action.



DEFENDINDYWRESTLING.COM

An **FSM** One To Watch back in 2011, "Wild Boar" Mike Hitchman was then noted for his aggressive, non-stop in-ring style. If you're seeing him in action for the first time in this video, you'll note that he hasn't deviated too much from what brought him to people's attention. He has, indeed, refined his craft while retaining all of the smash-mouth style that reminds **FSM** of NXT's Solomon Crowe. Recently seen at PROGRESS Wrestling, check him out wherever you can!

tinyurl.com/WildBoarHitchman



TAKE IT TO THE BANKS

Recent addition to the main WWE roster, Sasha Banks, has had to fight tooth and nail for air-time. However, as Michael Campbell uncovers, this is nothing unusual for the lady who clawed her way to the top of NXT.



Although Sasha Banks is no longer the NXT Women's champion, she can still be one of the biggest stars on the main roster

Sasha Banks has spent 2015 becoming one of WWE's most consistent performers, and in the process been the driving force that's elevated an entire division. That's quite an accomplishment within a company that historically has dismissed women as eye candy, reduced talented workers to punchlines in sexist angles, and steadfastly refused to offer equal creative support or promotional backing to any woman not born Stephanie Marie McMahon.

It is because of this that McMahon's husband, Paul "Triple-H" Levesque, has received so much praise for his vision for NXT, where Banks has been on a tear. On August 22, she stood out in juxtaposing the simple brilliance of the developmental brand with the overcooked main roster in a sensational showdown with Bayley. If fans were polled on whether this title match or the following day's six-person tag at *SummerSlam* was indicative of a "Divas revolution", the result would have been unanimous.

Banks' overall rise has been both swift and soaring, especially considering that she debuted only five years ago this month.

NEXT STOP, BOSTON

A first cousin of West Coast rapper Snoop Dogg, Mercedes Kaestner-Varnado grew up in Fairfield, California until the age of eight. The rest of her childhood saw a shuffle around the country, from Iowa to Oregon, and then Minnesota until she was 17. Her love of the grappling game was a constant – to the point where watching *Smackdown* became more important than dates with friends, family holidays, and even funerals – and the timing of a move to Boston afforded her an opportunity to pursue her dreams. Showing up at Chaotic Wrestling's "fantasy camp", she was not alien to the requirements, unlike many other hopefuls, and her preparation paid off in the shape of a three-month scholarship to the group's school, run by Brian Fury, Brian Milonas, and Todd Smith, who works as Ring of Honor star, Hanson.

"My first impressions were that she was very pretty, but also very prepared," Fury told **FSM**. "She was in shape and worked hard that day. When she first started, she had been a lifelong fan, so she had lots of natural instincts, which is great, but she was brand new and we taught her from the ground up."

"When she started her training, I was the only trainer that had been trained elsewhere, so I had a different perspective than the others, and I think it was a welcome change for the students. I worked extremely closely with Mercedes, helping her learn the psychology of wrestling."

As Mercedes KV, from the outset she showed fire, and was instantly recognised as having huge potential, especially as an idol to other young women. Crucially, with those around her being almost entirely male, the youngster was forced to train with men, which sat well with this ambitious rookie who wanted nothing but an opportunity. Demonstrating her commitment, she refused to be intimidated by these circumstances, using the experience as an opportunity to prepare for the physical and mental hardships that come with professional wrestling.

KV worked her way around the circuit, gathering a little momentum while cutting her teeth for NWA on Fire, New England Championship Wrestling and Premier Wrestling Federation Northeast. Somewhat surprising is that she started as a timid, "quiet, but sweet-as-can-be girl", as one colleague put it.

"When I met her, she was super shy, if you can believe that with the character she plays now!" said former SHIMMER star Ariel. "But you could tell she was like a sponge, taking everything in from everyone she was around."

"When she started, I thought she was just another female who'd probably not last," said fellow Chaotic wrestler, Barbie Menegan. "I definitely ate my words with that. She's a fast learner; she's fast in general, and a good listener. There was no problem flowing with her, because she's light on her feet. Every match with her was always fun."

Quickly, KV began to illustrate the criteria required to meet WWE demands.

"Her strengths were always her passion and willingness to learn," Brian Fury confirmed. "She rarely, if ever, missed training, and always wanted to be the best in class. Her work was really good for her length of time in training. She always strived to have the best match on the show, period, and she would get very frustrated if things weren't great. Those are all great attributes to have."

"As far as the locker-room goes, she was great - super nice and friendly with everyone. She asked for advice from lots of people."

"Her biggest weakness would probably be a lack of patience. She wanted to be the best and know everything so quickly. It takes time to learn all of this!"

BOSSING IT

Following a June 2012 training camp, she signed with WWE on August 18, 2012.

"Chaotic Wrestling had a good track record of people getting signed to either WWE or TNA," explained Ariel. "You could totally see she had a lot of potential, and she had a great look. She was very persistent and willing to learn, and that's obviously what they were looking for."

In recent times, the former NXT champion has noted that what WWE was looking for at this point didn't necessarily reflect the vision she had for herself, and in her early NXT days, the girls were instructed to perform to the Diva stereotype. Luckily,

Banks (here as Mercedes KV, with Golden Burke) had obvious talent from the get-go



© JOHN JEWELL



© SCOTT FINKELSTEIN



© MANDY COOMBES

Only Alundra Blayze's series with Bull Nakano is comparable to today's high NXT standards

after an initial reality check, this would become less of a battle, as her arrival coincided with the hiring of Sara Amato (Sara Del Rey) as the company's first female coach. A taskmaster in training, Amato wasn't always popular, but with the group's improvement, they were increasingly rewarded with the freedom to express themselves and engage in the sort of combat that their male counterparts took for granted.

Under this guidance, the newly-named Sasha Banks thrived, to the point where she was able to make her official television debut on December 12.

Despite some change for the better, at this stage the women's division in NXT was not what fans are familiar with now. Raw and struggling to implement its vision, it was the inception of the Women's title in the summer of 2013 that gave the division some perspective, providing a focal point that colourful personalities could surround, rather than just drifting in and out of purposeless feuds.

While Banks had struggled to earn attention with TV time at a premium, a bout with champion Paige on September 11 showcased her increased technical ability, and in particular, her penchant for chain wrestling. Following a flash pinfall loss, Banks laid out the champion, marking a much-needed heel turn that gave her the chance to play to a newfound strength: the ability to get under people's skin.

An increased role had to wait until the summer of 2013, when Banks formed the BFF (Beautiful, Fierce Females) group, initially with Summer Rae and then Charlotte. While this unit was typically Diva in concept, in practice it was key to providing a backdrop for character work, and valuable promo interaction with others. Banks excelled, becoming an entertaining villain on the fringes of title success throughout 2014. In the meantime, however, she also cultivated a well-defined character for herself, known as "The Boss", so when The BFF faction eventually splintered, her feud with new champion Charlotte

"As a taskmaster, Sara Del Rey wasn't always popular with her trainees, but with the group's improvement, they were increasingly rewarded with the freedom to express themselves"



Bayley's win at *Takeover: Brooklyn* will rank highly in the *FSM Readers' Match of the Year* poll

took an immediate and welcome twist. In a vital step, at *Takeover: R Evolution*, they battled in a deeply satisfying 12-minute title bout, and although Charlotte triumphed with a top-rope Natural Selection blockbuster, their chemistry was evident.

Banks reached the peak of her career thus far on February 11, 2014, usurping the Flair heir in a four-way at *Takeover: Rival*. Despite her heel status, the changing of the guard was well-received; Charlotte's main roster call-up had been anticipated, and the time seemed right to transition from the supremely talented but somewhat stern Charlotte to a Banks encouraged to be more "sassy" by Dusty Rhodes.

The in-ring tussle was also excellent. Despite housing four participants (adding Becky Lynch and Bayley) the ladies structured the contest in such a way that Banks' victory came off neither as a fluke, nor a forced moment. Everyone had the occasion to shine, before the scrap boiled down to the champion and Banks squaring off in a blistering finishing sequence. WWE bravely booked the climax around Charlotte refusing to tap, before Banks rolled her into a pinning combination rather than persevere with the submission hold.

It was shockingly simple yet highly appropriate, showcasing Banks for her intelligence as well as her athleticism. In the next six months, the then 22-year-old solidified herself as an icon of changing times.

MAKING HISTORY

Though one can argue about WWE's commitment to quality women's wrestling beyond Alundra Blayze's 1994 feud with Bull Nakano and selected Natalya singles matches, Banks' defences became some of the finest female contests in company history. More importantly, they've been right up there with WWE's greatest efforts of the year, regardless of gender.

"Vince McMahon remembers his greatest female ratings successes being proportionate to how few clothes Sable wore in 1998, and this is where Triple-H's support of female performers will be critical"

On May 20, Banks' defence at *Takeover: Unstoppable* could easily have been overshadowed. Between a Sami Zayn versus Kevin Owens re-match, the debut of Samoa Joe, and Finn Balor earning a bout for the men's title, the card was stacked. Instead, Banks and Becky Lynch entered a superlative effort; a technically sound but expertly paced battle that had the audience in raptures. Rarely in today's WWE do fans react as vociferously to submission attempts as they did here. They were perfect opponents on the night, as Banks' peacock arrogance meshed with Lynch's palpable determination to create a title match that felt worthy of that prize.

"I always try to outdo the guys, it doesn't matter who you are," Banks told *SportingNews.com*. "Even Sami Zayn - I want to have a better match than [him], and he is absolutely incredible. I knew at a very young age that I wanted to change the definition of what it is to be a Diva, and what it is to be a women's wrestler."

Though there was more to milk from an NXT title reign, August 22's *Takeover: Brooklyn* spelt the end of the 192-day run, but typically, the manner in which she lost furthered herself, opponent Bayley, and the desire of the fans for more. When Banks emerged through the curtain at the Barclays Centre, she did so in front of the largest crowd for whom she had ever competed. Many in attendance may not have experienced the her work before, but rather were drawn in by the hype surrounding *SummerSlam*, but that didn't stop either woman eliciting gasps as they put inventive spins on their trademark sequences. The match was a classic combination of characters that were over and a prize that was worth fighting for, along with an incendiary crowd moved by the blood, sweat and tears. It was even compared to the heyday of All Japan Women by *FSM* columnist Rob Naylor, especially when Bayley went all-out with a top-rope reverse hurricanrana before getting the pinfall with the Bayley To Belly suplex.

Indeed, more clearly than ever the match illustrated the difference between the main roster and NXT.

"I've been there when we had four minutes for my matches, to now have 15 minutes for my matches, to main eventing. To lose that would be so hard on me," Banks told *Afterbuzz TV* in July. "But it's always been my dream to be on *Raw* and *Smackdown*. If I can be a part of this revolution of NXT, I would love to be on *Raw* and *Smackdown* to see where that takes me, and see if we can transition what we have down there to up there, to have the phenomenon keep growing."

MY SO-CALLED "REVOLUTION"

Things haven't been quite so smooth since the ladies earned a collective call-up. Labelled a "Divas revolution", playing off the exploding popularity of UFC star Ronda Rousey, the appearance of Banks, Charlotte and Lynch on July 13 was unfortunately heralded by the aforementioned Stephanie McMahon. As the angle went, Paige had sought to end the dominance of the division by The Bella Twins, which caused McMahon to introduce the NXT call-ups, and for both the show's director and Michael Cole to play her up as the star of the segment.

The shoehorning of McMahon into a heated situation reeked of typical pandering. A heel most weeks on *Raw*, her confusing "positive speeches"

in support of female athletes were desperately out of character, muting their effectiveness. More damagingly, piggybacking on the achievement of stars such as Serena Williams was hopelessly out of touch. If there was a positive to be found, at least the initial in-ring action went down a storm.

August 24 marked a low point in the “revolution”, however, as Paige, Charlotte and Becky Lynch came across as desperately unlikeable as they strained to portray a tight sisterhood on Miz TV. Tellingly, the newcomer with the most established, fully-realised persona, Banks, was absent; the restless crowd chanted “We want Sasha!” and cheered when The Miz told The PCB (Paige, Charlotte and Becky – hastily renamed after “The Submission Sorority” returned the wrong kind of results on Google) to shut their mouths.

The crowd didn’t get its wish for Banks when Team PCB then battled The Bellas and Alicia Fox in a lengthy bout that was heckled in a manner not dissimilar to Randy Orton and Sheamus’ infamous Raw tussle from March 2013. It was a disaster, and that the bout was founded on *Total Divas*-esque bitchiness further bogged down the suggestion that the Divas revolution was a fresh start.

Worryingly, WWE couldn’t even copy the success of McMahon-Levesque sweetheart Rousey with an army of writers and every outcome under its control. Nor did the group have the basic foresight to present Banks and her contemporaries just as had been so successfully done on *NXT*.

VIVA LA SASHA

There’s a very simple reason as to why these wrestlers, most notably Banks, got so over on *NXT*: it wasn’t about gimmicks, all too obviously jumping onto a diversity bandwagon, or fulfilling a requirement. Nothing more was required; these performers connected with the crowd, and made them care on their own.

It’s natural that change and progress are aspects of *NXT* that Vince McMahon is going to resist on the main show, where he remembers his greatest female ratings successes being proportionate to how few clothes Sable wore in 1998, and this is where Triple-H’s support of female performers, and Banks in particular, will be critical. The new talent has at least upped the level of in-ring matches in the Divas division, and more often than not doubled said bouts from one to two, but once the title is removed from Nikki’s waist, this group of competitors will only get one more chance to prove worthy of their developmental reputations.

Clearly standing out from Team BAD colleagues Tamina and Naomi, and not lumbered with the booking of Paige, Charlotte or Becky Lynch, Sasha Banks is best-placed to be at the forefront of such a movement. Her match with Paige on July 27 was particularly good considering the *Raw* stage, as Banks went over her more established opponent with a clean submission victory. In a non-title bout with Nikki Bella on August 17, she tapped out the champion, too, in a surprising outcome that came following another encounter that beat the 10-minute mark, and was better for it. A re-match with Paige on September 7 had its flaws, including a double-pin



So far, the Divas revolution hasn’t begun to scratch the surface of its potential



on which the referee only counted down Paige, but if WWE can negotiate Bella’s record-breaking title reign and then have the courage of its convictions, the previous sorry booking can still be forgotten.

“I think that Sasha is just on another level right now,” enthused Brian Fury, in an optimistic tone. “I posted a few weeks back that she is the best female wrestler on the planet, and I meant it. Her matches are continuously phenomenal. She’s reaching a point where she is one of the best wrestlers going, period. Now it’s just a matter of her doing on *Raw* what she accomplished in *NXT*.

“I think change has been happening, and that’s the first step,” he continued. “The girls are getting longer matches and more than one match a show. If they keep delivering and the fans keep reacting the way they have been [on *NXT*], then things will continue to get better.”

At a time when Vince McMahon, Kevin Dunn and cronies clearly don’t get it, Banks has embarrassed them by making it clear that she does. Committed to her craft, she’s prepared to let her work speak for itself as she attempts to change the minds of the few remaining troglodytes in WWE creative.

“I’ve always wanted to do this,” she said. “Growing up, I was never really a fan of the Divas because I just never felt like they were role models for me.”

Though “The Boss” is a heel right now, and probably for the foreseeable future, Sasha Banks is ready to break the mould in the women’s division.

At only five years in the business, just imagine what she could achieve in 10.

JEFF JARRETT

IN JANUARY, **JEFF JARRETT** SPOKE TO **FSM** ABOUT HIS PLANS AND GOALS FOR GLOBAL FORCE WRESTLING IN 2015. HERE, HE UPDATES EVERYONE ON HOW THOSE PROPOSALS ARE GOING, AND HOW THE GFW STRATEGY HAS BEEN FINE-TUNED OVER TIME.

When I last spoke to **FSM**, I noted how – if everything went to plan – Global Force Wrestling would look in one year's time. I said, "We would be producing shows, have our talent roster, the sponsorships, venues, the distribution, all those deals finalized... We'd be up and running a full-on wrestling promotion, so to speak."

We're heading into October to do a third set of TV tapings. The roster is very diverse, and the vision of working with other promotions – obviously TNA is probably the most topical one – is happening. The sponsorship situation is another domino that we're continuing to work on. So over the next three to four months, we're going to continue to make the strides to progress and, in my opinion, we are on track.

Would I like for things to have happened a little bit faster? Yes. But the world of distribution – whether it be broadcast, whether it be streaming networks – is a rapidly changing landscape that we, as well as all other forms of entertainment property, are adjusting to on a daily basis. Social media initiatives have come into play quicker than I expected, and the online community has been nothing short of fantastic. We have our shows; I'm in Iowa today, we have three shows for the minor league ballparks, the Grand Slam tour continues to roll along, and we've got shows in the UK in later October, so we're progressing.

IN TANDEM WITH TNA

Business is business. Would I have said six months ago that we would be doing a promotional deal, working together with TNA? I would have said no, but stranger

things have happened, and quite frankly I think it's been a win-win-win: a win for TNA, a win for Global Force, and a win for wrestling fans because they're getting to see something unique, and what's best for business is what's best for business. That's how I was raised. We're pleased at this point.

The TNA taping schedule has meant we've had to put together a lot of the storyline and record it before any of it airs. That's very different to the old Memphis days where you got crowd feedback every week, and could adjust. It's very challenging, and that is probably a huge understatement. This business has always thrived on episodic television, with twists and turns coming week to week.

WRESTLE KINGDOM: A CROWNING ACHIEVEMENT

In the archaic world of pay-per-view, the finalized figures took upwards of six months to gather, but our presentation of *Wrestle Kingdom* was an overwhelming success, and our strategy was obviously successful, done promoting 100% online – there was no traditional form of advertising with the pay-per-view companies or the wrestling companies. The New Japan product spoke for itself, while Jim Ross and I promoted that event with countless hours of podcast and online interviews and print media. We really, really hit the press for about six weeks before that event, and it paid off. Like I said, I'll tip my hat to Jim Ross and I'll tip my hat to everyone who wrestled on that card, because it was a legendary event. It was truly a spectacular.

AMPED FOR TELEVISION

We've stayed the course; I've been doing this a long time, and knew going in what me and my team wanted to get out of our tapings. The Las Vegas crowd – we'll call them the Amped Army – was spectacular. We had wrestlers from around the world: PJ Black from South Africa, Sanada from Japan, Nick Aldis from the UK, and The Bollywood Boys for India. Las Luchas is also a great luchadore team. We had a very diverse roster, and it really showcased all the different styles. So, it was a real special night for me personally, because I got to see step one of the vision come into place, where you have all these different styles of wrestling

© TABERCIL



One of the members of the GFW roster, Sanada (right), is still considered a big prospect in Japan



"I cannot wait for the world to see Amped TV, and see how it came together. You will see it soon – I'll just leave it at that"

Jeff Jarrett is a former six-time WWF Intercontinental champion, a former four-time WCW World heavyweight champion, and is a TNA Hall of Famer. He launched Global Force Wrestling in 2014, and will be a part of events in the UK this month. Visit www.GlobalForceWrestling.com for more information.

A TNA vs. GFW interpromotional feud has recently main-evented Impact Wrestling



under one umbrella, and the fans responded to it marvellously.

I cannot wait for the world to see *Amped TV*, and see how it came together. You will see it soon – I'll just leave it at that. The documentary style that we are putting together is very exciting, with the real stories of the athletes: why they want to be in Global Force, why they want to go after the Next Gen title, the Global title, the Tag Team titles, the Women's titles, and just how they arrived at this point, where they are at in their life, where they are at in their career. It will all be documented on *Amped*.

I have to mention Chael Sonnen. He's a competitor at heart, and he came in to Global Force Wrestling ready to compete; not in the traditional sense of MMA contests, but to compete. He's got a passion for professional wrestling, and he wants to be the very best color analyst he can be; he's got a mindset for that, and I'd say thus far he's over-delivered. He's very, very good at what he does, and is very knowledgeable and very passionate.

As a businessman, you look at the opportunities that are being presented from a distribution point of view. We're very excited about the opportunities that have been presented to us since we went to Las Vegas, since we developed content.

Things have escalated and we'll be releasing that information very soon.

WE LIVE FOR LIVE

We're in year one. I've been around this business a long time, and I've learned over the last 10-15 years that you have to start with creating brand awareness. You have to start with a real grassroots initiative, and that was one of the goals I had going into the Grand Slam tour.

We wanted to come in and partner with a first class organization in these cities and communities, which is the minor league baseball teams, and they have their dedicated marketing team and their digital team and their social media team – their infrastructure and operations and facilities and all that. The deal we have with these organizations incentivizes them to make the most of those resources.

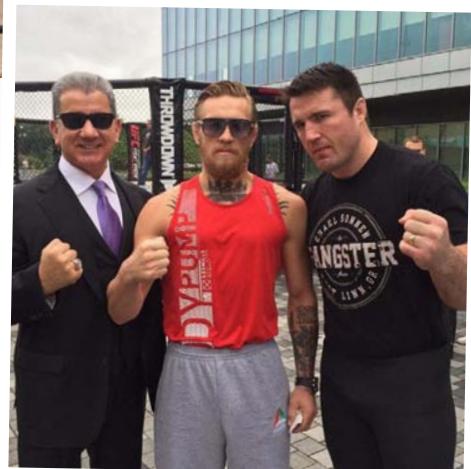
We're already in discussions about next season's Grand Slam tour and what stops we're going to make. Ball teams are talking to other teams on how we're going to do things a little better, and just add to it. We're talking about adding fireworks to the show, adding different elements from a local level, coming out and having what I'll call a value-added night of professional wrestling.

PARTNERSHIP PLOY

The UK dates come back to creating brand awareness. Nick Aldis – who I think is a phenomenal talent; I've always thought a lot of him – has one of those shows is in his hometown (King's Lynn). We strategically picked those towns with our familiarity and with the venue. The WWEs and the TNAs of the world have their London, Manchester, and Glasgow, all the traditional cities, and so much like with our minor league baseball partners, we want to go into communities that we can truly partner with, and that's what we've done.

We're very excited for those shows – ticket sales are going great!

GFW visits Grimsby on October 28 and King's Lynn on October 30. For more information, and to purchase tickets, visit www.GlobalForceWrestling.com.



Chael Sonnen (right, with Bruce Buffer and Conor McGregor) has his sights set on being a hit broadcaster

Mickie James will be a part of GFW's shows in Grimsby and King's Lynn in late-October



MAGNUS OPUS

VISITING THE UK FOR A WEEKEND OF SHOWS IN LATE-AUGUST, **NICK ALDIS** GOT THE CHANCE TO SURVEY THE SCENE AHEAD OF GFW'S DEBUT IN THE COUNTRY. IN THIS COLUMN, HE COMMENTS ON PCW AND ICW, TWO GROUPS MAKING BIG WAVES IN THE BRITISH MARKET.

I'm certainly not going to tell you anything you don't already know when I echo the sentiment that the independent wrestling scene in the UK is at a fever pitch. Business is up across the board for most competent promoters, and a handful in particular have taken the bull by the horns and developed a loyal fanbase, using smart marketing, branding and trust.

I got my first taste of the front-runners during the August Bank Holiday weekend, wrestling in front of a packed house of over 3,000 at Winter Gardens in Blackpool for Preston City Wrestling, then heading north of the border and getting my first taste of the almost mythical Insane Championship Wrestling at *Spacebaws*. The **FSM** editor had politely asked me to write about my experience, particularly with ICW, as he has been lobbying hard on both ends for well over a year to get us to work together. The booker in him knew how well I would go over there as a villain, while the businessman in me saw it was a no-brainer. Similarly, I'd had my eye on PCW for quite some time, watching their evolution from afar and being mightily impressed.

While I was contemplating how to put together this month's column, I started thinking of different ways that I could describe my observations of both companies while avoiding being repetitive, because

the reality is that there are many similarities between these two successful organisations.

i) The promoters are strong personalities.

I've met Steven Fludder of PCW a few times over the years, after first being introduced by Doug Williams, if my memory serves me correctly. It was a brief meeting, probably backstage at a TNA show, so I didn't recall much about him personality-wise. However, like anyone successful in the business, you start to hear different descriptions, and I've been around long enough to know that usually means you're doing something right.

When we first started discussing plans to work together going forward, I could tell that Steven had evolved into a savvy promoter; he's candid about what is profitable for him and how his business model works, and is not secretive or overly protective. When Mickie and I arrived backstage at Winter Gardens, Steven was all smiles in a suit and outrageous cowboy boots, which popped Mickie, of course.

He reminded me in brief moments of Brian Dixon, which is meant as a huge compliment. He knows what he's doing and he has a good balance of friendliness and distance from the talent, which keeps him objective, at least in my observation.



© LEE SOUTH / TNAWRESTLING.COM

“The engagement and enthusiasm of the loyal fans will sweep up the casuals through word of mouth over time, which is when business really picks up”



Nick wrestled PCW champion Dave Mastiff in Blackpool on August 29



If it's more of Nick that you're after, you can catch him in action on Challenge TV, where you'll see him as Magnus on Impact Wrestling. Also check out Nick's official website at www.NickAldis.com, find his fan page on Facebook (Nick Aldis aka Magnus aka Oblivion) or follow him through Twitter by searching for [@MagnusOfficial](https://twitter.com/MagnusOfficial).

Mark Dallas' drive and vision has been a pivotal factor in ICW's success



© TONY KNOX

Mark Dallas, the mad scientist of ICW, is more of a familiar figure to those who watch their on-demand programming. Like many people in the business, his ICW persona is an extension of his real personality; a street-smart, ambitious Scot with a ton of energy, who despite his smaller stature clearly and deservedly has the respect of his roster. After having a chance to speak with him about business, I could see that ICW's success is no accident.

One thing that struck me about Dallas was that he wears a lot of hats (promoter, booker, director from backstage, and performer) yet was still very accessible to his guys. Previously I've expressed my dismay at independent promotions who run long story arcs and "creative" for no reason, but ICW is a storyline-heavy promotion that has done it the right way; by establishing a core fanbase first, then using the angles to keep them hooked. In my honest assessment, it's almost unfair to refer to ICW as an independent promotion at this point, but for lack of a better term, that's what

PCW boss Steven Fludder has developed a reputation as a straight shooter on the UK scene



© PCW / GORDON HARRIS

With an apparent score to be settled by Grado, it surely won't be Nick's last ICW appearance



© DAVID J. WILSON

they're still classified as, despite being a well-oiled machine with a strong brand that is going to get bigger and bigger if they stay the course.

A quality wrestling show requires a unified effort, and ICW has a good team in place. This has always been the case, but with the demands for production values and added value in the modern era, it's truer now than ever. Both shows had a good crew of staff working in the production and front-of-house capacities, with PCW's more geared towards retail/customer service and ICW's toward their impressive production and creative capabilities.

It was exciting for me to see these great team efforts produce quality products, as it is often easy for independent promoters to spread themselves too thin, with the show suffering for it.

ii) They book really good talent.

Obviously I might look biased for saying this based on the fact that they booked me, but in spite of my presence on the show, I saw a great collection of talent at both events. PCW focused more on name power, with myself, Mickie James, Ken Anderson and The Wolves all featuring alongside some top UK talent like Dave Mastiff, Iestyn Rees and Noam Dar, who I also saw at ICW the next night. The growing number of Scottish talent that is getting really, really good too, not to mention "The Beast of Belfast" Damian O'Connor, who is a force with great presence that I saw first-hand in my brief confrontation with him following my tag match with Kid Fite against Grado and Colt Cabana. (That match, by the way, is the most fun I've had in a long time.) "Big Damo" will be part of the first GFW UK show on October 28, along with Noam Dar and Nikki Storm, who for my money is the best female worker in the UK, not to take anything away from Kay Lee Ray, who had an

@MagnusOfficial Had a blast at my first @InsaneChampWres show last night. Got a feeling it won't be my last...

...

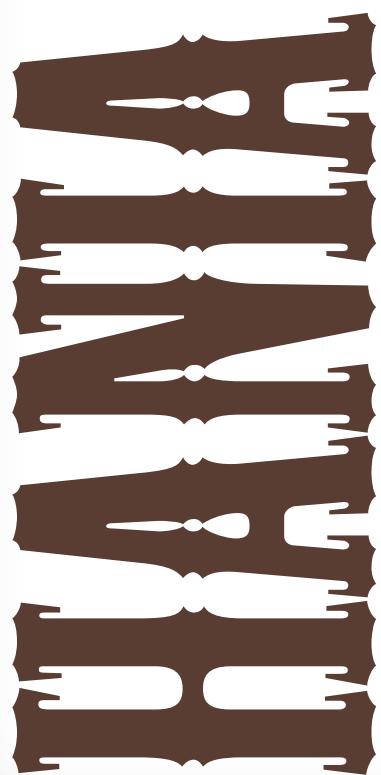
excellent match with Mickie, has improved a ton, and who I enjoy more as a heel. I was looking forward to seeing Jack Jester up close, as he's another well-polished character with a big upside. The guys up there are benefiting from the experience of long-time All Star Wrestling veteran Mikey Whiplash, who has reinvented himself and seems to have found a new home.

PCW and ICW have developed loyal fanbases, but still draw casuals, which is the proverbial sweet spot for all wrestling companies, regardless of size; they have a strong core group of fans that consume large amounts of the product, while still attracting and impressing more casual fans of the genre and offering them a great time. The engagement and enthusiasm of the loyal fans will sweep up the casuals through word of mouth over time, which is when business really picks up (™ Jim Ross) and you get an ass every 18 inches (™ Bill Watts/JR).

The PCW show was at a new venue for them, so according to Steven, their usual fanbase was not as apparent, even though the place was totally full. ICW fans are legendary almost on their own, with a boisterous energy and enthusiasm not seen since a certain Bingo Hall in South Philadelphia. They did not disappoint; I've said many times that I prefer being a heel, and I was able to completely lose myself in that Glasgow crowd the second I stepped through the curtain.

As the British scene continues to evolve and hopefully prosper, I think it's safe to say that most promotions should be looking to the examples set by PCW and ICW for inspiration and proof that with a good team, persistent marketing and, above all, a solid show, the sky is the limit.

As someone heavily involved in the planning and promotion of the GFW UK debut shows, I can honestly say that I'm looking up to these guys.



WSU, AWS, Queens of Combat
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PHOTOGRAPH: BLAKE THOMAS / BLIZ PHOTOGRAPHY

BODY BLOW

Having conquered the pro wrestling business, 25 years ago this month Vince McMahon set his sights on another empire: bodybuilding. However, as David Bixenspan writes, success did not come as naturally to the World Bodybuilding Federation.

In 1990, Vince McMahon had been in the publishing business for nigh on seven years. Being that he was a bodybuilding aficionado, it caused no alarm when he launched *Bodybuilding Lifestyles*, a magazine that was his take on the genre that included *Flex*, *Muscle And Fitness* and others. Those two titles were published by the empire of Joe Weider, the man who controlled the sport via his International Federation of Bodybuilding. Throughout the summer of 1990, there were rumours that *Bodybuilding Lifestyles* was going to lead to a Titan Sports-produced IFBB competitor, which the former denied. That September at *Mr Olympia*, the IFBB's biggest competition, booths were sold to fitness-related exhibitors, including rival magazines. Titan secured a spot, guaranteeing a big splash to its target audience.

After the competition itself ended, retired bodybuilder/*Bodybuilding Lifestyles* spokesman Tom Platz hit the stage, as the \$5,000 Titan spent also netted it some prime advertising time. When Platz started speaking, he cut to the chase.

"I have a very important announcement to make. We at Titan Sports are proud to announce the formation of the World Bodybuilding Federation.

"And we are going to kick the IFBB's ass!"

Women in evening gowns then entered the room and handed out flyers that promised "dramatic new

In 1990, bodybuilding impresario Joe Weider found his empire under attack by Vince McMahon



events and the richest prize money in the history of the sport." The 1990 *Mr Olympia* was thus the beginning of yet another in a long line of promotional wars for Vince McMahon. This time, though, he was much less concerned with his rival than he was taking over the world... through bodybuilding.

While not *quite* as ridiculous then as it sounds 25 years later, when bodybuilding barely exists to the general public, it was still a considerably tall order, especially since McMahon had hopes of it out-grossing professional wrestling.

GRANDSTAND CHALLENGE

When you consider that the Weiders gave Platz stage time, they had to have been taken by surprise. They shouldn't have been; the WWF's parent company had actually been contacting bodybuilders going back well over a year, and some had told the Weiders about it. Shawn Ray, who had placed third behind Lee Labrada and winner Lee Haney minutes earlier, was one of them. Ray was disillusioned with IFBB politics, having been suspended for a year due to a misunderstanding regarding proof of an injury that kept him out of the first Arnold Classic.

"That's when I heard the rumblings that there would potentially be a new federation, that Vince McMahon was heading it, and that Tom Platz was recruiting athletes. This was all on the down-low," Ray told **FSM**. "[The suspension] didn't sit well with me, which was the time that Vince was constructing this new federation. I was 24 years old. It sounded very good to me at the time, and here, I was being offered a potential opportunity that would give me a guaranteed salary. But, they would get back to me."

Thankfully for Ray, they did.

"They were planting the seeds in my head that in 1990, some things were gonna happen, and I was at the top of their list. Now, being at the top of the list of a Vince McMahon, who's well-funded, sounded really good to me."

At the time, Ray was making about \$40,000 annually from Weider Publications, as well as additional income from prize money and appearances, so he decided that he would jump if the money was right. That feeling got stronger when he was stripped of the 1990 Arnold Classic championship for failing the drug test, though he wasn't suspended by the IFBB.

"It did solidify to me at that time that if the WBF called me back, I would be all ears," Ray recalled.

When he met with Joe Weider to verify that he could compete in *Mr Olympia*, he mentioned the WBF talks and agreed to give the IFBB first right

of refusal. Weider promised that if he passed his drug test and did well, he'd be "substantially rewarded", something he could also use as a bargaining chip against the WBF. Ray came in third at *Mr Olympia*, and knew that he had a bright future. Before long, he was invited to Titan Towers.

"Naturally, I was excited. I had just won \$18,000 at *Mr Olympia*, which wasn't lost to Vince McMahon."

McMahon and Tom Platz explained their goal of recruiting an all-star team à la expansion era WWF, and presented a solid dollar figure for the first time. As they kept going, though, Ray's mood soured.

"They explained to me that it was gonna be 'entertainment bodybuilding'. They only had one show on the calendar, and it sounded like the pecking order was gonna be based on what you were being paid. The highest-paid guy was gonna be the winner, and I wasn't the highest-paid guy."

Where the WBF erred in negotiations was taking too much time dealing with a close-knit community. Everyone was comparing both the pay and contract length, and that's when Ray saw that the money wasn't based on metrics like IFBB competition placement. His training partner, Troy Zuccolotto, was offered more money in spite of never having competed as a professional.

"To me, that was the dealbreaker, that they would offer a guy that never competed as a pro more than me, and I just got third in the *Mr Olympia*."

The 5ft 7in Ray was also the youngest competitor, with theoretically the most years left, yet was offered less than the much larger Gary Strydom, whom Ray had just beaten at *Mr Olympia*. Ray went back to negotiate, and the WBF wouldn't budge.

"They liked the big, big guys, and Gary had a strong persona, and was gonna be their flagship [star]. Before Thanksgiving 1990, I decided I had a better opportunity to win the *Mr Olympia*, and be the number one bodybuilder in the world, [rather] than go on a two-year experiment run with no guarantees of a third or fourth year contractual raise, or even that the Federation would last."

He went back to Weider, making a deal that had less guaranteed money, but that worked out better: by the time he retired in 2001, he had placed in the top five in every *Mr Olympia* but his first, and had been on more *Flex* covers than any bodybuilder.

COULD THIS BE MAGIC?

On January 30, 1991, the WBF held a press conference at the Plaza Hotel in New York. Illustrating the hopes it had at the start, Tom Platz told the assembled media a whopper: "I look forward to the day when a WBF superstar is on an airplane and a tall black man looks over and says, 'Hey, I saw you on TV last night.' And that tall black man is Magic Johnson."

One reporter asked Platz if the WBF would drug test and, if so, what the penalties would be. Platz said yes, they'd be testing, but in lieu of penalties, it would be on an educational basis.

Titan signed 13 "WBF bodystars": Aaron Baker, Mike Christian (fourth at the 1990 Olympia; the only top five finisher to jump), Vince Comerford, David Dearth, Berry DeMey, Johnnie Morant, Danny Padilla, Tony Pearson, Jim Quinn, Mike Quinn, Eddie Robinson, Gary Strydom, and Troy Zuccolotto. Shawn



Ray noted that "Vince got a lot of castaways. There was no-one in there that had the pedigree of the people that chose not to go." Strydom and Christian were national champions who had done well in *Mr Olympia*, but the roster also included 40-year-old Danny "The Giant Killer" Padilla, who was effectively retired, and Tony Pearson, who was decorated in the 1970s, but past his prime.

Meanwhile, the inaugural *Bodybuilding Lifestyles* had hit newsstands a month earlier. With little else to talk about on the sporting side, it was the opposite of the WWF in that it didn't ignore the competition. However, it used the space to bash the Weiders; *Mr Olympia* was covered heavily, but framed as badly run and improperly judged. This first edition somehow had a letters page, including a note from a "reader" who criticised *Muscle And Fitness*, accusing Joe Weider of self-aggrandisement by shoehorning 224 mentions of his name (they counted) into a recent issue. Unlike Weider's magazines, steroids were not mentioned at all, but that would change.

The Weider side ignored the WBF publicly until late-February, when it published an article signed by Ben Weider, Joe's brother and IFBB co-founder, who dissected the rights taken away by a WBF contract.

"If you wish to learn what the World Wrestling/Bodybuilding Federation is all about, you should read their contract," began one paragraph. "This contract will expose their desire of total control of the athlete, the removal of all individual professional freedom, and a contract that is so one-sided that any attorney would advise his/her client against signing it."

Shawn Ray outlined the importance of that, noting, "I didn't give away my brand. In the WBF contract, they owned the rights to your name, your likeness, your image, anything you were marketing or selling, including videos, clothing, and 8x10s. You couldn't make any independent appearances, unless it was through the WBF, and they would get the monetary compensation for it, because they owned you."

LET BATTLE COMMENCE

A few weeks before the first WBF championship event on June 15 in Atlantic City, the war heated up. The IFBB *Night Of Champions* in New York opened with a graveyard set on the Beacon Theatre's stage. There were 13 tombstones, each bearing the name of

At a time when he was disillusioned with IFBB politics, Shawn Ray got a call from the WBF

"If you wish to learn what the World Wrestling/Bodybuilding Federation is all about, you should read their contract"

Gary Strydom was a national champion when hired seemingly to be the WBF's golden boy



Mike Christian was runner-up to Strydom in the first WBF championship in 1991



a WBF performer. Cue a group of IFBB bodybuilders, who destroyed the tombstones with sledgehammers.

As much as the WBF is remembered for being over the top, the first *WBF Championship* was reasonably subdued. Shot for later home video release and recapped on WWF TV, the long-promised pomp and circumstance was limited to Regis Philbin as celebrity host, strong production values, real-life personality profiles, gimmicky nicknames and stage entrances that were influenced by them. While Aaron Baker was "The Dark Angel", all that really meant was that he wore a wacky costume as he was lowered to the stage on an elevator platform. It was goofy, but it was not a gigantic change for bodybuilding, and rather just modified posing. The only wrestling-style theatrics came from Mike Quinn, who closed his profile with a promo and was put over as the athlete most supportive of the WBF concept.

There was some slight of hand in promoting the show: while it was claimed that the WBF offered the biggest prize money in bodybuilding history, including a \$100,000 first prize, a bodybuilder only got that money if it exceeded his annual salary. Strydom, with his \$400,000 annual deal, won the championship (and thus no additional money), while second highest-paid, Mike Christian, was runner-up.

The placements were known within bodybuilding circles before the show, and even if they hadn't been,

Best-known for playing TV's *Incredible Hulk*, Lou Ferrigno was set to come out of bodybuilding retirement for the WBF



"After the 1992 show, it couldn't be more clear: wrestling fans and the general public didn't want the WBF or anything like it"

Strydom was clearly positioned as the star. Not only did he go on last, but when the top five were introduced, they were arranged so that Strydom stood in the middle. Bodybuilding journalist Peter McGough soon reported that the fix was in, which didn't surprise anyone in wrestling. McMahon, for his part, denied it, telling wrestling historian Dave Meltzer that "[it] was a complete shoot. I didn't care who won. All were of equal personality to me. I hadn't even met any of the judges before the contest, although I knew of Dave Draper and Fred Hatfield by reputation. The Weider organisation is doing everything they can to discredit us."

With the first show out of the way, a new problem emerged within days, one that Titan should have foreseen: the steroid issue was about to be blown wide open in the mainstream.

THE STEROID SCANDAL

The steroid distribution trial of Dr George Zahorian, a Pennsylvania urologist and former state athletic commission ringside physician, didn't come out of nowhere. He had been indicted in early-1990, but there was little media interest in the case until his lawyer, William C. Costopoulos, released the list of wrestlers to whom he was charged with distributing drugs. The biggest name on that list was Hulk Hogan.

The WWF went into panic mode, refusing comment to any news organisation, including the broadcast networks' evening news shows. After a few days, it released a statement, accusing Costopoulos of "utilising the media in a 'bait and switch' defence." The statement closed by saying that "[to] insure the safety and well-being of our performers, fans and employees, in June 1987 the WWF adopted a drug policy prohibiting the use of controlled substances in connection with any of its professional activities." That wasn't entirely true, as it tested for just one controlled substance: cocaine. That started after The Iron Sheik and Jim Duggan were arrested together on drug charges while working as bitter rivals on TV.

Hogan didn't testify in the case. In lawyer Jerry McDevitt's first collaboration with the WWF, he filed a sealed motion to get Hogan excused because Zahorian had treated him for a legitimate medical condition that would be publicly embarrassing. Since he wasn't vital to the case, it worked, and that charge against Zahorian was dropped. Still, when it came to the WWF and Hogan being branded as a steroid user, the damage had been done, especially since the wire services didn't report on his removal from the case.

On July 16, Vince McMahon held another press conference in New York where anyone considered "wrestling media" (including mainstream newspaper writers like Alex Marvez) were either banned or told it wasn't happening. McMahon opened by dropping a bomb: "Approximately three-and-a-half, four years ago, I personally experimented with deca-durabolin for a short period of time. It was supplied to me by Dr Zahorian." He then said that Titan would implement a comprehensive steroid testing programme covering both the WWF and WBF.

With almost a year until the next competition, there was time to get to work. Dr Fred Hatfield, a decorated former powerlifter with a doctorate in the social science of sport who served as Weider's Director of

Research and Development, was hired away to fill the same role for Titan Sports. Hatfield outlined his responsibilities when speaking to **FSM**.

"My principle job was to come in and develop a line of nutritional alternatives that athletes could use in their quest for bigger size and strength, and also so that the wrestlers in the WWF could [do likewise]."

He brought in Canadian physician Dr Mauro Di Pasquale to head the drug testing programme, which raised some eyebrows because Di Pasquale was known as the guy to go to if you wanted to learn how to beat the tests. That said, it also made sense that he'd know how to spot doping.

Hatfield's duties also included researching how his combined diet and training programme would work for the average person. The end result was a product line called IcoPro (Intergrated Conditioning Programme). Titan produced IcoPro to market on WWF programming, in its magazines, and on a new TV show called *WBF Bodystars* (a time-buy on USA Network in 1992).

"I was quite proud of IcoPro, and I still am," Hatfield noted. "Bodybuilders didn't like it – they like juice (steroids). The athletes in general didn't like it because they knew that steroids work remarkably well at helping people recover from intense training."

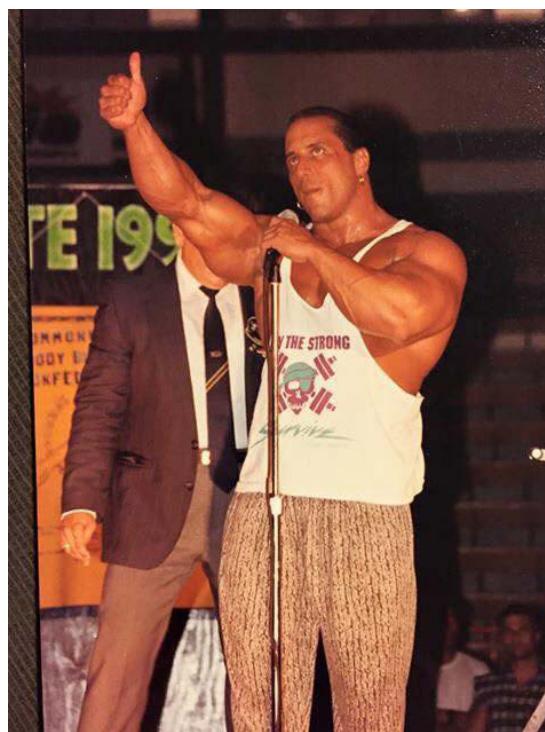
When the WWF testing started, McMahon explained to Dave Meltzer that not only would they be tested, but the WBF would be more stringent than the WWF testing because the bodybuilders knew how to beat the tests. McMahon mentioned a meeting he had conducted with the bodybuilders, going into specifics about what was discussed, what the bodybuilders had asked, and so on.

There's just one problem with that: there was no meeting, at least not by this time. It ended up taking place in early-1992, at the height of the WWF's steroid and sexual harassment scandals, with Gary Strydom asking about everything McMahon had told Meltzer had been discussed months earlier.

CROSSOVER APPEAL

The run-up to the 1992 *WBF Championship* was seemingly about securing crossover hooks. Bodybuilder turned *The Incredible Hulk* star Lou Ferrigno was signed for a comeback. The WWF's week on game show *Family Feud* was the WWF versus WBF, with the bodybuilders as babyfaces against heel wrestlers and managers. And at *WrestleMania VIII*, a new signee was announced: Lex Luger, fresh off losing the WCW title in a match where he was such a neon sign that WCW Executive Vice President Kip Frey apologised for his superhuman appearance. Luger was able to get out of his WCW contract on the proviso that he didn't do any wrestling for the remaining year – time he wanted off anyway – and legally, it stuck.

More effort and money was thrown at the WBF, but the landscape was changing. Drug testing was a reality and led to visible changes on the WWF side, which didn't necessarily make wrestlers clean: testing records filed as exhibits in The Ultimate Warrior's final lawsuit against WWE showed that he was never punished for failing a drug test. In 1993, Warrior told a federal grand jury that the wrestlers were frustrated by a perceived double standard.



For the 1992 WBF championship, 5ft 2in Danny Padilla (here with Joe Weider) was introduced via a Jack and the Beanstalk skit

Come 1992, "Mighty" Mike Quinn's physique was notably inferior to the year before

"I have never seen anyone taking steroids, but I have been working out in gyms for 20 years, and I know when somebody is and is not, and I know the bodybuilders were taking steroids."

"The athletes finally figured out that they could purposefully get themselves caught, so that they could get themselves suspended, and under suspension, they'd go back on that juice, get themselves back in shape, and beg their way back into favour with Vince," commented Dr Hatfield. "It worked out that way; it wasn't planned that way."

Whatever the case was, Titan looked for a silver lining by turning it into a marketing angle: they trademarked a slogan (with accompanying logos) for the WWF and WBF promising "100% tested prime beef", seemingly referencing the idea they had the most impressive drug-free athletes in sports.

LAST-MINUTE RESHUFFLE

Around the time it became clear that the bodybuilders would be tested, Ferrigno pulled out due to a flare-up of carpal tunnel syndrome. That left Luger as guest poser for theoretical crossover

@tholzerman Ah the Arnold Classic, the time of year when Vince McMahon gets drunk and wistful and yells at WWE that he wishes WBF was child that lived

appeal, but he broke his arm in a motorcycle accident days before the 1992 event. The only direct pro wrestling appeal left on the show, which aired live on pay-per-view, was Gene Okerlund as host with Vince McMahon, and Bobby Heenan joining Tom Platz on commentary. Onstage, the show was tweaked into something akin to a Vince McMahon fever dream.

The personality profiles were gone, replaced by pre-recorded skits dealing with the bodybuilders living out their nicknames/alleged personas, inevitably ending with them stripped down to posing trunks and walking onto the stage, where the entertainment continued. Eddie "Major Guns" Robinson showed up with a machine gun full of blanks, using it to shoot ninjas that attacked from all over the theatre. Danny Padilla had a *Jack And The Beanstalk*-themed skit, did a normal posing routine, and then battled a giant onstage as McMahon offered a huge belly laugh. Mike Quinn was a mixed bag: on one hand, he was even more committed to the WBF's vision than before, in his skit entering through the crowd after breaking out of jail, doing an elaborate dance routine, and lip-syncing his own rap song. On the other hand, he was noticeably overweight by pro bodybuilding standards. The result was McMahon, in his excited announcer's voice, screaming about Quinn's physique being noticeably inferior to 1991.

Those were the best of the lot, and as Shawn Ray put it, "the fans were looking to see a bodybuilding

After the WBF, Eddie Robinson became the head of another famous McMahon project, ICOPRO



After falling to Joe Weider in the bodybuilding game, Vince McMahon went back to what he knew



show, and they got guys who were doing everything but bodybuilding." Even if a bodybuilding fan was open to it, if they only read Weider's magazines they would know nothing about it in the first place, in a key factor that had eluded McMahon.

Also on the show, Heenan and Platz repeatedly compared the proceedings favourably to a Broadway play, while Platz and McMahon pushed the competitors as being "drug-free" and "without steroids". Soon after the show, in a report later confirmed by Muscle Mag International, the Muscle Beach newsletter reported that 10 of the bodybuilders had failed drug tests, with suspensions ending just before the competition.

In the end, Strydom won again. Nobody cared; advance sales were so low that some cable companies dropped the show at the last minute. The pay-per-view was purchased by approximately 3,000 homes, 0.02% of the pay-per-view universe at the time, and 1.2% of the 250,000 buys generated by 1992's lowest-drawing WWF supercard, *Survivor Series*. After the first show, McMahon could delude himself into thinking there was potential for success, as there was no pay-per-view and the home video was – like most WWF releases – priced at \$59.95, with video rental stores being the primary market.

After the 1992 show, it couldn't be more clear: wrestling fans and the general public didn't want the WBF or anything like it.

FLYING THE WHITE FLAG

Quickly, the World Bodybuilding Federation vanished. *WBF Bodystars* ended after an episode built around a shoot tug of war where the bodybuilders lost to a team of WWF heels. WBF Magazine folded, with Titan issuing a press release claiming that "[with] the absence of WBF Magazine, which has been perceived as a barrier by some, the WBF is hopeful that there can be a more co-operative relationship among the many organisations within the bodybuilding industry." IcoPro lasted well into 1993, as did Gary Strydom with his three-year contract, and Eddie Robinson, who became the IcoPro spokesman. Other than a Lex Luger returning to the ring, IcoPro was the one lone remnant of the WBF on WWF television after the summer of 1992.

For most of the WBF bodystars, their outlaw status was the beginning of the end. Anyone who wanted back in the IFBB had to pay a substantial fine; none who did were re-signed by the Weider magazines. Years of guaranteed money for one show a year and not needing to hustle for appearances led to bad habits of all kinds among the WBF talent, and not doing appearances hurt interest in and awareness of them as individuals. Gary Strydom, who Shawn Ray says "created a life for himself from being the two-time WBF champion" still "failed miserably" upon his return to the IFBB.

For guys like Ray and those who followed him, the WBF was great. It was just a bargaining chip, but it kept the Weiders on their toes and led to long-term pay scale improvements.

As for Vince McMahon, his reputation changed forever. No longer was he a marketing genius; he was just "the wrestling guy", a title he's spent the last 25 years trying to shake.

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NAYLOR'S NOTE PAD

AN ANNUAL EVENT SINCE 2005, PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA'S BATTLE OF LOS ANGELES NEVER FELT BIGGER THAN IT DID IN LATE-AUGUST, THANKS TO A HOST OF INTERNATIONAL TALENT.

ROB NAYLOR REFLECTS ON A WILD THREE NIGHTS OF STATE-OF-THE-ART PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING.

As I made my way from Orlando, Florida to Los Angeles, California to attend Pro Wrestling Guerrilla's three-night *Battle Of Los Angeles* tournament, I was filled with an excitement to attend a pro wrestling show that I probably haven't had since way back in the mid-2000s for Ring of Honor, in what I'd call its prime years.

I knew going in to the shows that I was going to love them. There is just something about the American Legion Post #308 in Reseda, California that no other current pro wrestling venue can capture. The vibe, the buzz and the energy in that place is just unmatched; I recall some of ROH's hottest shows (think the Manhattan Center in 2006) eliciting the same feel, but they were few and far between.

The *BOLA* line-up was a who's who of pro wrestling. It featured simply *the* best talent domestically, a stellar selection of luchadores, Europe's finest, and guys like Drew Galloway who had large reputations from WWE and who were out to prove themselves in front of a new audience. The shows were a stylistic tour de force, with something for every fan of professional wrestling. There were great strikers in "Speedball" Mike Bailey, Chris Hero, Roderick Strong and Tommy End; some of the best technical wrestlers on the planet in Drew Gulak, Timothy Thatcher, Zack Sabre Jr, and Pentagon Jr; and high-flying specialists such as Matt Sydal, Mark Andrews, Ricochet, Andrew Everett, Rich Swann, Jack Evans, and Angelico, not to mention a performer that came out of the weekend with a ton of buzz – the UK's own Will Ospreay.

There was plenty of hype leading into the shows throughout social media. #BOLA2015 trended all weekend long, and as noted many times, had sold out in a matter of three minutes of tickets being released. The company has a long-standing rule about not giving out comps, so even with many movers and shakers in the wrestling business attending, it was slim pickings

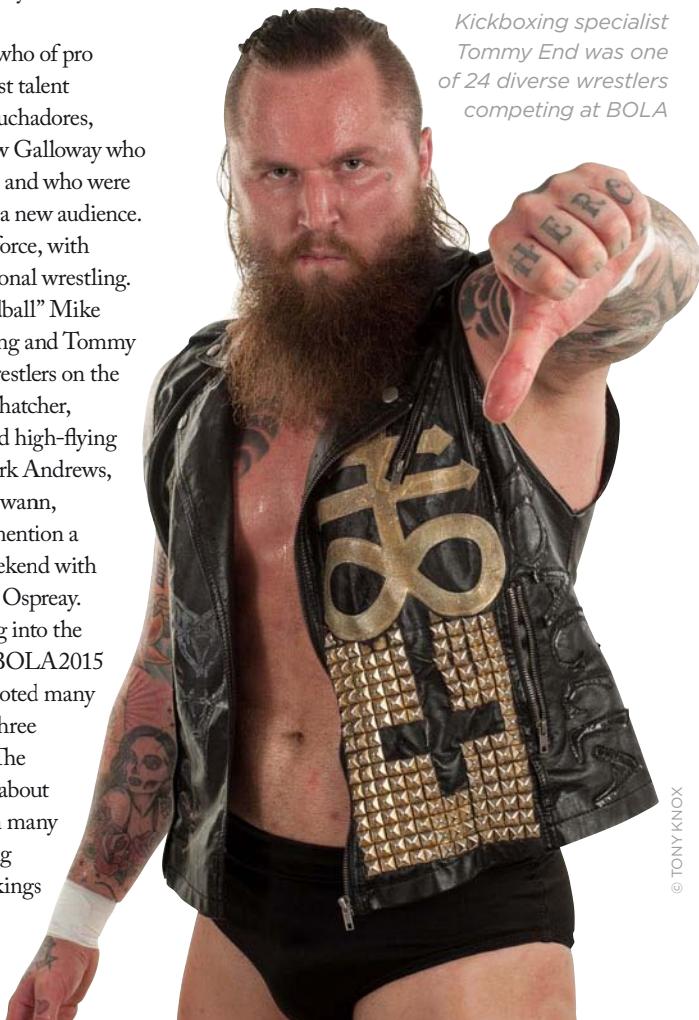
to get inside the 400-seat venue every day, at ticket prices that were steep compared to other indy groups, but worth every cent.

Of course, those high ticket prices go right back into the promotion, allowing for loaded line-ups to even exist.

GOOD CONVERSATION

I spent my first night in California in Hollywood, catching up with old NXT friends Ryan Nemeth and Phil Friedman, who performed comedy at a local club. A great time was had, and the following day, I made my way to the Renaissance Hotel where I met up with the Highspots.com crew.

Kickboxing specialist Tommy End was one of 24 diverse wrestlers competing at BOLA



© TONY KNOX



"I am a huge proponent of high-flying pro wrestling, and I love seeing it get taken to the next level, which is exactly what Mark Andrews and Will Ospreay did"

Rob Naylor is a former WWE Creative Assistant at developmental territory NXT, and is a colour commentator at EVOLVE and SHINE Wrestling. He is a lifelong student of pro wrestling who counts "Raging Bull" Manny Fernandez as his favourite wrestler.

Jack Evans was the first person Rob Naylor met when arriving at the PWG's infamous Reseda venue



Two of 2015's finest wrestling talents, Roderick Strong and Zack Sabre Jr., have words before the Night One main event



Highspots is an important cog in the PWG wheel, giving the company a large DVD distribution market almost since PWG's inception. I had a blast meeting up with many in the crew, who have always been nothing but professional and great to work with (cheap plug: I filmed five interviews over the course of those three days with Chris Hero and Dave Meltzer; Excalibur and Joey Ryan; Jack Evans and Angelico; Biff Busick and Mark Andrews; and Will Ospreay and Marty Scurll. Be sure to snag them all around Christmas season!)

Upon arriving to the American Legion, the first person I saw was my old friend Jack Evans. I've known Jack since 2003, but hadn't seen him since 2009, so it was a blast catching up with him and getting tales of his AAA exploits with talents such as Juventud Guerrera, LA Park (the former La Parka), Ted Hart, and even Silver King. We talked about how more wrestlers need to watch Japanese women's wrestling to find things nobody else does in the ring. Angelico was also there, and I offered a formal introduction, noting we had mutual friends in PJ Black and Adam Rose. I asked Angelico about his training under the guidance and tutelage of mat wizards Negro Nevarro and Black Terry in the Toryumon Mexico promotion, and he also shared stories about working with Booker T, Rikishi, Matt Cross and Neville (formerly Pac) in Italy, of all places, several years back.

Other familiar faces soon would arrive: Ricochet, Sydal, Gulak, Thatcher et cetera. Everyone was in good spirits and excited to be in L.A. for the weekend. The vibe prior to the event was one of friendly competition; PWG is such a rare locker-room in that everyone pushes each other to try to steal the show, and there are zero restraints put on any of the talent. No match is instructed to not outdo another.

Despite their loyalty to PWG, many fans thought that bringing in a large number of

competitors from the UK and Mexico represented a gamble on the group's part. That was quickly put to rest, however, as the varied styles stood out, and literally every talent from this pool got over huge with the live audience. Tommy End and his hard-nosed K-1 kickboxing style was greeted with raucous chants also heard in the likes of PROGRESS Wrestling; Marty Scurll had the crowd eating out of the palm of his villainous hand from the moment the dark chorus of his Bloody Beatroots theme song began; Zack Sabre Jr. was arguably the most popular star on the entire show; while Will Ospreay and Mark Andrews needed about a minute-and-a-half of spirited action to be accepted as stars from by an audience that has seen it all in the last decade.

The luchadores also shined bright, with Aero Star dazzling the audience with maneuvers few had ever seen; Fenix – who was arguably the lucha MVP of the weekend – having amazing showings against top-flight competition; Drago looking freakin' cool with his unique mask and gear; and, of course, Pentagon Jr. standing out from the pack to loud chants of "cero miedo!" ("zero fear!") all weekend long.

I sat in on a great dialogue between Fenix and Chris Hero, as both men discussed working with legendary lucha grappler, respected trainer and the pioneer of the "llave" ("key") style of chain wrestling, Skayde. Both men smiled and shared familiar stories of watching this master briskly tie opponents into knots with 15 consecutive intricate yet flawless movements, and then looking to his students and saying, "Okay, got that?"

There were cool moments where generational talents actually converged for the first time in years, such as in the case of Ricochet and Jack Evans. I recall speaking with Jack in 2005, and hearing of stories of a high-flyer out of the Midwest who was dropping jaws with his spectacular aerial moves, such as a double moonsault press – something neither Jack nor

@FifiGigantor Now that a little time has passed I can officially say night 2 of #BOLA2015 was 1 of the best nights of wrestling I've ever seen. #Amazing



On Night Two, Timothy Thatcher and Chris Hero fought a superb re-match of their March 28 bout for WWN

I could comprehend at that time. This wrestler would later turn out to be a teenage Ricochet.

TAKING FLIGHT

Hours passed before the jam-packed crowd filed into the building for Night One. What a show they were about to witness.

From top to bottom, the first night of *BOLA* delivered, with standout matches including Matt Sydal versus Fenix and Biff Busick versus Andrew Everett. The former showed Sydal's ability to not just be a premier high-flyer, but also one hell of a base for others, as at one point, he vaulted Fenix high into the air and Fenix cut a forward roll and hit a rana on the way down. The latter bout was a war of attrition, a clash of styles of sorts, as Busick employs a no-nonsense style of wrestling while Everett is best-known for his ability to attack from the air. Perhaps the highlight of this encounter was toward the close of the match: Busick caught Everett mid-air on a Shooting Star with a nasty uppercut that had those in the crowd audibly cringing.

The main event of Night One included three of the four members of Mount Rushmore, The Young Bucks and Roderick Strong, facing the European dream team of Zack Sabre Jr., Marty Scurll and Tommy End. This match had it all,

@RebelDentistNAI So... #WWE will be in Hampton this Friday. And instead of buying tix to that, I pre-ordered all 3 #BOLA2015 DVDs... :)

"Speedball" Mike Bailey takes Drew Galloway over in a crucifix driver



© DEVIN CHEN

EXCALIBUR CUTS TO THE CHASE

PWG CO-FOUNDER EXCALIBUR ANSWERS QUESTIONS FROM **ROB NAYLOR** ABOUT THE BATTLE OF LOS ANGELES WEEKEND

Rob Naylor: What were your overall thoughts about this year's *Battle Of Los Angeles* tournament?

Excalibur: I think it was probably the best weekend of wrestling we've ever had. From an in-ring standpoint, it was a tremendous success, and I would challenge anyone to find three better nights of wrestling from anyone, consecutive or otherwise. Really, it speaks to the level of talent in the locker-room, and the level of professionalism and dedication to their craft. The three guys in the finals in particular; each match that they wrestled felt like a complete match – one that could have fit in on any other show. They could have used the second and third-round matches as an opportunity to rest up for the finals, which I don't think anyone would have faulted them for given the heat and exhausting schedule, but these guys went all-out in every single match. And their performances were so good in each match! It's mind-boggling.

Tell me a bit about the European influence on the shows this year.

The European contingent had a tremendous influence on the quality of the shows. The best thing about PWG becoming what it is today is that we've become something of

a destination for a lot of guys. It brings out the best in people when they view PWG as a place they want to wrestle, not just as another booking, and I think that attitude is perfectly reflected in the ring. The best part is these are guys that many American fans have little or no opportunity to see live, so it allows us to showcase them for a whole new audience, and hopefully increase their visibility and demand in the States.

The *Battle Of Los Angeles* winner was Zack Sabre Jr. What sets him apart from the rest?

Zack's performance was astounding because he wrestled more matches than anyone this weekend, and you couldn't tell at all. The heat was brutal, and Zack almost collapsed in the back after his match with Marty, but it didn't show one bit inside the ring. He's a uniquely talented wrestler; beyond being an impressive technician, he's got such a great mind for it, for reading the crowd, for thinking on his feet. It's been a tremendous pleasure to have him as part of PWG, and I can only hope that wrestling for us has been beneficial to his growth as a performer.

If that sounds a bit like an "obituary", maybe it is, because I can't imagine he'll remain a free agent for long.

with swanky mat wrestling and brutal-looking joint-locks utilized by Sabre, high-impact striking offense from End and Strong, and all of the tag team specialization that The Young Bucks regularly bring to the table. This bout ought to have had an air-traffic controller and not an official, given the fast-paced style throughout.

The best match of Night One, however, was perhaps my new favorite match of the entire year: the Will Ospreay versus Mark Andrews clash. I am a huge proponent of high-flying pro wrestling, and I love seeing it get taken to the next level, which is exactly what these two talents did. The aerial moves were out of this world, and the state-of-the-art style brought the crowd to a complete frenzy with each and every twist and turn.

This was a star-making match for each of these incredibly talented wrestlers.

HERO OF THE DAY

Night Two is actually being heralded as the best show of the weekend, and potentially the year, and I would have a hard time arguing that point, even though Night Three was my personal favorite. This event had at least five excellent matches, and nothing you'd call less than "very good".

Chris Hero versus Timothy Thatcher built slowly with the exchanging of holds and counters, and got very hard-hitting toward the close of the contest. Hero has had an incredible in-ring 2015, and was arguably the MVP of this absolutely loaded tournament. Thatcher is incredibly gifted, and is one of the more facially-animated wrestlers you'll see. Both men have a distinct connection to the crowd, and it adds that extra something to every match they take part in.

Drew Galloway debuted for the promotion on Night Two, and by the end of his bout with Mike Bailey had the crowd going completely bananas. I worked with Drew at length while we each were at WWE, and he's a guy that has never been given the push or a chance commensurate his talents. I recall that it was a year ago when myself, Trent Barreta and Drew were hanging out in Tampa, and we implored him to try to get into PWG, as we knew he'd fit like a glove. It was exactly the type of atmosphere where there were few politics and zero agents looking to sabotage the talent; an atmosphere where – gasp! – pro wrestlers could reach their potential while truly enjoying the art form at its finest. Thus, it was so gratifying for me to watch him go out with a buzzworthy talent like Mike Bailey and pull out every trick he'd learned about building to a climactic finish, and putting over the young grappler while getting over on his own merits.

The lucha tag team bout in which Fenix and Aero Star defeated Pentagon Jr. and Drago was nothing short of sensational. It was the perfect showcase for four of the most spectacular

One of PWG's founders, Super Dragon, showed off his recent change in attitude by curb-stomping referee Rick Knox

luchadores in the world. Think back to late-1997 when WCW had Juventud Guerrera team with Rey Misterio Jr. for *one week*, and they had an incredible tag about against Psicosis and La Parka. This was like an updated version of that match, just chock-full of spectacular and intricate lucha libre, with ups and downs interwoven throughout the contest.

Ricochet versus Zack Sabre Jr. was a showcase of two of the best wrestlers in the sport today, and a first-time match-up pitting stars that work for Dragon Gate/New Japan and Pro Wrestling NOAH respectively. Ricochet's incredibly athletic style was pitted against the more cerebral and submission-based offense of Sabre, and it all blended together perfectly.

The main event of the show was complete and utter chaos. Finally, after months of organic build, Biff Busick (joined by Trevor Lee and Andrew Everett – who gutted out an incredible performance after banging up his hip on Night One) went head on with Super Dragon (flanked by his Mount Rushmore companions The Young Bucks). Weapons galore came into play in this match, which combined the latest high-flying with frenetic brawling, all of which had the audience buzzing for hours after the conclusion of the show. Mount Rushmore proved to be dominant in this one, and after commentator Excalibur was attacked again in the post-match, PWG stalwart Chris Hero finally got involved by going blow-for-blow with Super Dragon.

NIGHT THREE THRILLER

And then there was Night Three. It all came down to this: a monolith of a five-hour show. There was so much good stuff all over this one.

The cool thing about this tournament was the ability to tell stories from one match to the next. Jack Evans squeaked out a win over the massive Brian Cage, only to be destroyed after the bout, thereafter coming out in full-on mummified bandages for his next-round bout with Hero.

Speaking of Hero, he has been utilizing a piledriver for months in PWG, and nearly every time he hits it, it's curtains for his opponent. I, for one, really enjoy the idea of wrestlers working for their holds, and Hero has protected the danger of his piledriver simply through the urgency of his opposition, who try everything to avoid being hit with it.

On this show, Hero won an emphatic fall over Biff Busick with an incredibly rare piledriver off the second rope, which is one of the craziest moves I've seen in years. When Hero later went for the same maneuver on Zack Sabre Jr. in the finals, the Brit fought for his life, grasping for anything to thwart the hold, as fans were on the edge of their seats cheering for him to not become its latest victim.

© DEVIN CHEN



© DEVIN CHEN



At the end of a punishing three days, it was left to Zack Sabre Jr. to celebrate with his European compatriots

There were other standout matches up and down the card, including Will Ospreay versus Matt Sydal (a bout fans of Revolution Pro are familiar with); Mike Bailey versus Tommy End; Chris Hero versus Jack Evans (a brilliant match built around, of all things, a one-count!); Mike Bailey versus Matt Sydal; Pentagon Jr. versus Zack Sabre Jr.; and perhaps my personal favorite match in Zack versus Marty Scurll in a brilliant ode to *World Of Sport* that was a master class in working a live crowd. All of this doesn't include the final or two incredible multi-man tag bouts, the first being Aero Star, Gulak, Galloway, Trent Baretta and Chuck Taylor versus Drago, Thatcher, Andrew Everett, Mark Andrews and Tommaso Ciampa in a slapstick classic that had the crowd – including Rey Misterio Jr and Konnan – in stitches. The second such match, which saw

Roderick Strong, Super Dragon and The Young Bucks face on Fenix, Rich Swann, Angelico and Ricochet, was just as memorable.

Needless to say, there was a lot to like over the course of the three-day tournament. I came out of the weekend completely re-energized about pro wrestling; there is a lot of great stuff currently going down, from New Japan to NXT to the burgeoning UK scene to ROH and EVOLVE, but make no mistake about it, Pro Wrestling Guerilla is *the* must-see pro wrestling promotion, as they put on star-studded shows for a rabid audience that just eats it up every time.

If you have the means and the ability, do not miss out on purchasing tickets when they drop. I'd highly advise all fans to take the sojourn and make their way to the West Coast.

You'll be glad you did!

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THE CORNETTE CONCLUSION

WHILE HE CAN WIN A VERBAL JOUST WITH ANYONE, **JIM CORNETTE** HAS BEEN ON THE RECEIVING END OF TWITTER CRITICISM RECENTLY. THEREFORE, HE EXPLAINS HIS ISSUE WITH THE YOUNG BUCKS, AND WHY THEIR STYLE OF WRESTLING IS DAMAGING TO THE INDUSTRY.

Not only can't I figure out how to word this column, but I'm actually astonished that I have to write it. How do you describe something in writing that is so instinctually obvious that you are amazed it needs explanation? I have finally decided that I will work it out, on paper, as I go, attempting to analyze just what it is that has made a certain segment of the current generation of fans and wrestlers oblivious to the very things that have helped usher the wrestling industry into an era where it is less popular with more people than it's ever been.

I wrote in a previous column an old adage I was taught by veterans when I first got into the business: "The boys are their own worst enemies". This usually applied to their outside-the-ring exploits, but today, a lot of younger wrestlers are the epitome of good conduct outside the ring, and it's their in-ring performances that hurt the business *and* all the boys, in a variety of ways. I'm starting to call it "performance" wrestling, to distinguish it from those who are trying to do real pro wrestling, or even "sports entertainment". It basically boils down to guys who, for reasons of size, or look, or promo, or attitude, are never going to be taken seriously as main

event talent in a big promotion, but who are often athletically gifted, having matches and doing moves that look more like videogames than physical conflict.

Or you could call it Young Buck syndrome, since their success in the indies has made it even more popular among wrestlers to emulate. Almost everyone has heard our verbal jousts on social media this year, but for the uninitiated, few I'll give a quick recap.

On my weekly podcast – *The Jim Cornette Experience* on MLWRadio.com – in January, reviewing the New Japan Tokyo Dome event I gave my opinion of the four-team, eight-man match involving The Young Bucks and others. It was a mess; scrambled eggs in a ring, everyone doing move after move as fast as possible. You couldn't even keep track of who was whose partner, which was especially disorienting for the new viewers on U.S. pay-per-view. I mentioned that I liked some of the participants personally, and most were good talents, but I would have rather seen two tag matches that made sense.

I did single The Young Bucks out in one respect: the ridiculous move they did where one got an opponent up for a Tombstone piledriver, and the other did a springboard somersault off the top rope



Jim Cornette has had somewhat of a running battle with The Young Bucks and their fans



© TONY KNOX

"I've loved wrestling all my life, and just because it can never again be as popular as it was doesn't mean we have to repeatedly spit on any hope of anything being taken seriously again"

Having worked as a manager, booker, and promoter during his wrestling career, Jim Cornette would be an invaluable columnist even if it were not for his encyclopedic knowledge of the history of the business. You can read more from "The Louisville Lip" at www.JimCornette.com, where he also sells his personal merchandise, including his new book *Rags, Paper and Pins – The Merchandising of Memphis Wrestling*.

into a spike of the move. I mentioned that if they did it on a show of mine and it was not the finish with the guy carried out on a stretcher afterwards, I would have fired all of them.

And I would have.

Of course, this warmed the cockles of the hearts of The Young Bucks and their pre-adolescent fanbase, who continue to this day to tweet out pictures of Grandpa Simpson shaking his fist at clouds, and talk about how old and out of touch I am. In all fairness, I do occasionally poke them with sticks, since they're so easy to – what do the kids call it? – troll, such as when I mentioned on Twitter, after their fans scolded me that The Bucks “were on a sold-out show in Budokan Hall”, that if they wouldn't do such silly shit, they wouldn't have to go all the way to Japan to find work.

But it's generally prompted by me reading another goofy statement by The Bucks or one of these jackoffs playing wrestler that “the business has evolved”, or that wrestling needs to be “fun” and “entertaining”.

SUPERKICK (BIRTHDAY) PARTY

My latest brouhaha with The Bucks and their fans was when footage surfaced of them on an indy show somewhere in front of about 50 people – which in fairness to them may have explained why they did this, but it got hundreds of thousands of views on the internet and The Bucks more than anyone else should have known that could happen – working competitively with an eight-year-old kid.

I'm not fucking kidding.

Apparently, for the kid's eighth birthday, he and his father, who worked for the “promotion”, were in the ring with The Bucks when the supposed “best tag team in the world” gave the dad a “devastating” double superkick. The kid then made a comeback on The Bucks, firing gut-shots – the only part he could reach even on the minuscule Matt and Nick Jackson – which they sold crisply. Then, the kid hit the ropes to charge at The Bucks and they gave *him* a double superkick as well. Luckily, in less than 20 seconds, the dad had recovered to pull the kid out.

Bear in mind, this work looked crisper and more “believable” than most of the shit the fans were likely to see on the rest of that card. At least as believable as it can be when a supposed main event pro wrestling tag team hits a double superkick on a grade schooler, and he doesn't require facial reconstruction surgery, or even have a fat lip.

I mentioned that The Bucks should be boiled in oil for that one, and their Twitter following went insane again. “Why shouldn't they make a kid happy for his birthday?!” My response to that was instead of shitting on your entire profession, why not take him to fucking Chuck E. Cheese for a pizza?

This was full-speed work that indicates that *anybody* can do this shit.

MAKING WRESTLING WORK

Think about this before we delve deeper. The whole reason for pro wrestling becoming a work to begin with was to manipulate outcomes for box office appeal, and prolong the stars' peak years by not only controlling their wins and losses, but extending their careers by making it easier on their bodies. The art form became striking a



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Former UFC fighter Dan Severn will be one of the first to tell you that a life in pro wrestling punishes more than MMA



Incredible moves like The Great Muta's moonsault have been devalued over time

balance between being colorful and “entertaining” enough to get over, while still maintaining the overall presentation of a violent physical conflict, selling the effects as if the moves were real while not suffering the actual damage.

Today, there have been statements made by almost everyone who has done either pro football or MMA at a high level that pro wrestling – the “fake” stuff – is harder on the body than any other sport. Wrestling, supposedly a work, is now more painful and more dangerous than having the shit kicked out of you *for real* by the top fighters in the world. An ever-increasing need for the boys – at least the ones who can't get there because of their size, look, talent, promo and ability to work a believable main event match – to “top themselves” and “get noticed” has caused them to throw the conflict out the window, concentrate on the performance of moves, and usher in a future generation of wrestlers who will probably be crippled or wheelchair-ridden.

A lot of people ask why I care so much about this that it makes me mad. Well, just because I won't live to see climate change sink New York and Miami underwater doesn't mean that I don't want future generations to be able to see them. I've loved wrestling all my life, and just because it can never again be as popular as it was before the 1990s came in and shot everything to hell, doesn't mean we have to just give up and repeatedly spit on any hope of anything being taken seriously again.

Don't get me wrong, pro wrestling has been hurt a lot worse by other factors. Corporate ownership or involvement has put a lot of people with zero product knowledge in charge of a lot of things. This, along with the advent of the internet, saw more people “smartened up” to the inner workings of the business – just enough to be dangerous, that is – between

Wrestlers like Jay Briscoe come across as believable, even at a time when fans know how the business works

© SCOTT FINKELSTEIN



Joey Ryan's penchant for intergender matches can't be compared to Jim's ringside battles with Baby Doll



disrespectful but more damaging to the business. It all has a cumulative effect of making fans immune to the thought that these moves hurt. Yes, I'm aware that everyone now knows wrestling is a work, but who knows how a vertical suplex actually feels? They know *what we portray to them*. If you give someone a move and they don't sell it, it makes you look weak, it makes the match look phony, and it gets nobody over. If you do that 50 times in a match, you're just ribbing yourself, beating up yours and your opponents' bodies for no reason. If you give someone a move that they couldn't possibly live through, much less continue on from if it was real, it's basically all of you taking the risk of shortening your careers – or even lives – for the sake of a pop in a match that you have already proven is fake.

I've had people say that 'The Midnight Express did more cool, intricate and complicated moves than any other team of their era, which is true, and that 'The Bucks and others are just ramping that up. I respond that in the Express' case, whether a move made the repertoire or not depended on if they could perform it both safely and with no obvious cooperation from the opponent. First and foremost in our minds was that the match should look like a fight we were trying to win, which does not describe performance wrestling. Can you imagine what wrestlers as talented as Bobby Eaton and Ricky Morton could have done if they were just trying to do cool moves without trying to make it a fight?

Remember when Bobby Eaton gave an eight-year-old an Alabama Jam for his birthday? Neither do I.

DEVALUING YOUR CURRENCY

It's true that most fans now never grew up in an era when even if much of the population knew the business was a work, they knew no details, and every promotion was presented as strictly a shoot, with the boys policing themselves if anyone got out of hand, did unbelievable stuff, or talked too much. So it's not really modern fans' fault that they just view wrestling as something to watch for fun, and not to be taken seriously – they've learned that from the boys. Yes, these gymnastics exhibitions earn cheers and screams from the several hundred fans that gather to watch them, but I grew up in a time where the state of Tennessee alone often approached one million live event wrestling tickets sold in a calendar year, so I'm a tad tougher to impress.

It still baffles me, though, why the wrestlers themselves want to make their jobs harder, or why the guys who have the tools to get over as serious money players don't rein in some of the kids playing wrestler. A noted **FSM** writer recently said to me: "Every statistic available shows that people will pay more money to see characters they believe in, in matches with something on the line.... Until performance wrestling makes that amount of money, at best the Bucks have a moot point, and at worst it is downright harmful to the rest of the industry."

Let's be brutally honest: guys like The Bucks are never going to be looked at by fans as legitimately able to kick anyone's ass, like a Jay Briscoe or Samoa Joe, so they have to compensate by doing things that wow the crowd. They just do too much; all wrestlers now punish their bodies three times as much for a third of the reaction they got 25 years ago, and it's a slippery slope.

1990 and 2000 than in the previous 100 years combined. The ultimate hot-shutting of all time, the Monday Night War, caused by Eric Bischoff's lack of knowledge of wrestling history and McMahon's lack of ability to handle being topped by a competitor, saw the era of Russo-riffic booking that ended – as historians knew it would – in the fans' inability to be moved by almost any angle or finish.

I liken that type of booking to German fetish porn; once you've seen *that* stuff, it's hard for the topless blonde and the pizza delivery guy to make your jaw hit the floor.

But these videogame matches are the equivalent of physical hot-shutting, and their long term effects may be even worse. So let's break down all the reasons why performance wrestling hurts not just the business of pro wrestling, but the wrestlers themselves.

A MATTER OF RESPECT

When The Great Muta introduced the moonsault, it was the coolest move in wrestling, and if he hit it, it was the finish. Then Vader did it, and proved that a 400-pound man could. Then Terry Funk did it, on a Smoky Mountain show of mine, and proved that a 50-year old could. Then the girls started doing it. Then it became a highspot good for a two-count. Now every outlaw wrestler does a variation, and the crowd goes *mild*.

Wrestler and trainer Lance Storm, known for being fairly calm and reasoned and definitely not a bitter 1970s wrestler, called the incident with the kid "disrespectful" to the sport. In previous generations, when The Bucks returned to the locker-room, the other boys would have beaten them up and thrown them and their bags out in the street.

In the case of the videogame matches amongst grown-ups, the game to see how many ineffectual superkicks you can throw or dangerous dives you can do, just because the crowd reacts to it like an Olympic gymnastics routine, is equally as

"Baby Doll knocking me out was entirely believable to me, after the night she potatoed me with a punch and really did knock me out"

As tough as Ronda Rousey is, there's a reason she doesn't compete with male fighters of the same size

Perhaps it's because of how easy it is to get into wrestling now over previous generations. For 90 years, it was easier to get into the Mafia than wrestling. If you did, you could make anything from a meagre full-time living to a fortune, but you felt that you had been bestowed with a privilege of entering this closed society, and being trusted with its secrets. You were thrown in with a locker-room full of veterans and top talent who could both teach you the stupid things not to do, and why, as well as monitor you to make sure you showed respect for what you had been allowed into.

Now, literally anyone can get into wrestling, although when they do most will work for very little, if not free, and it could be years before they wrestle or even have a conversation with a proven, veteran, main event talent, who may or may not be motivated to help them. The reason for that may be selfishness, or it may be that the veteran has given up hope that anyone will listen, since it seems many youngsters have "learned" more from reading the internet than from listening to folks who have been successful at something for 30 years.

INTERGENDER IGNORANCE

I hesitate to even mention the current fad that's an even more egregious slap in the face to our sport than the videogame matches: intergender wrestling. I'm not trying to give Joey Ryan publicity – even though as a small, average mid-card indy talent, he needs it – but he's the primary proponent of this new piece of buffoonery infecting the sport. He has a female tag team partner (editor's note: Candice LeRae) and they actually find male tag teams that have so little self-respect that they will work with the two of them on a competitive basis, as if it's two guys, and of course all 300 people in the VFW halls eat it up. When he can't find a promoter desperate enough to book intergender tag matches, Ryan actually wrestles women one-on-one, competitively, which is about five times worse than the tag team slop.

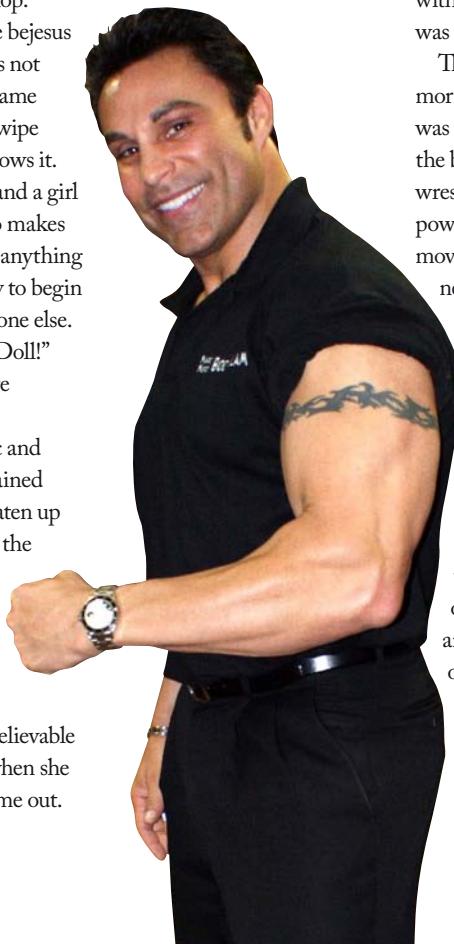
Yes, folks, I'm sure Ronda Rousey can stretch the bejesus out of the guy that works at the corner deli, but she's not whipping Georges St. Pierre, even if both had the same body weight, because a pro male fighter is going to wipe the floor with a pro female fighter, and everyone knows it. Having obviously staged "matches" between a guy and a girl is the epitome of performance wrestling, which also makes the business look phonier and stupider than almost anything else. It's also distasteful to a large segment of society to begin with, and wrestling doesn't need help to offend anyone else.

"Oh, bullshit, Cornette – you did a job for Baby Doll!"

Of course I did; a few dozen, in front of anywhere from 2,000 to 20,000 people, for which I was paid tens of thousands of dollars. The differences in logic and execution were this: as a heel manager, I wasn't a trained fighter; I was *supposed* to be a wimp, and getting beaten up by a girl added to my heat. More importantly, in all the weeks of that programme, and all those matches, I hit Baby Doll *once* – a gut-shot with the racket in the original TV angle – and every match consisted of the wrestlers wrestling each other and me running from her until she caught me and knocked me out. Which, by the way, was entirely believable to me, after the night in Raleigh, North Carolina when she potatoed me with that punch and really did knock me out.



After coming up short against his wife, Marc Mero effectively talked himself out of a big match with "Stone Cold" Steve Austin



Baby Doll and I did not go out there and work highspots and hurricanranas; I assure you, the first time we tried that would have been the last night of our employment.

CAREER SELF-SABOTAGE

In the matter of intergender wrestling, I shall leave you with a short but valuable story. It was the late-1990s in the WWF, and "Stone Cold" Steve Austin was to wrestle Marc Mero in the main event of a card in Los Angeles on a Friday night, with a sell-out crowd expected and the pay-off probably between \$5,000 and \$7,000 for 20 minutes' work. The previous Sunday, on pay-per-view, Mero had come up with the brilliant idea of letting then-wife Sable, who he was feuding with in storyline, powerbomb him.

The phone rang in Vince McMahon's office the next morning. It was Austin, wondering who his new opponent was going to be in L.A. He got one, too; there was no way the biggest box office attraction in the sport was going to wrestle competitively and sell for a guy who had just been powerbombed on live TV by a 120-pound woman. That move cost Mero a lot more than the L.A. pay-off; he was never taken seriously again – if he ever had been to begin with – by either the fans, the wrestlers, or the office.

Pro wrestling is not "evolving" when guys devalue their craft by making it look silly, easy, or phony. That hurts every single wrestler, because they then have to go to further and further lengths to make people believe in them, or their work – which is ultimately how a wrestler draws money – and that shortens careers. Then there will come a time – it probably already has – where no amount of work will convince the fans to believe in someone, and they will just be watching for the "performance" of it all. We already know from evidence all around us that those folks are much smaller in number than were fans of wrestling when they took it seriously.

Just because they know it's predetermined doesn't mean they have to know it's as phony as a football bat.

All about APTER

Ahead of the release of his autobiography, **David Bixenspan** sat down with legendary magazine man Bill Apter to discuss a 45-year career in a wrestling business he still loves dearly.

There are a lot of misconceptions out there about Bill Apter, the wrestling magazine legend who now works behind the scenes at **FSM** in an administrative and advisory capacity. With a new book out and a tour coming to promote it, he's hoping to clear some of them up. For one, he never had any ownership stake in the magazines he's synonymous with, nor was he ever the publisher.



© BILL APTER ARCHIVE

Bill Apter made his name as the frontman for the London Publishing magazines like *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*

"I do not live in a mansion," he says in his unmistakable, calming voice.

He was never the editor of any of those magazines, either.

"More important than anything I did at that company, more important than any photograph I took, more important than any columns that I wrote, was my relationship with the people in the business. They accepted me as one of the boys. I never crossed anybody in the industry. I was trusted, and I never broke that trust."

Apter never worked for Jim Crockett Promotions, a belief that some fans hold stemming from his *Scouting Report* segment on the *Best Of Championship Wrestling* show that aired on Sunday evenings on TBS.

"[Crockett] was nice enough to give *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* a segment during the wars between his and McMahon's company. We were kind of in a war with the WWF at that point, because they had their own magazine out and banned the outside wrestling magazines. Yet I still had a good relationship with everyone there, including the McMahons, so that was a business thing."

And there's the big one: he never wrote under a pen name, much less wrote all of the magazines under the London Publishing umbrella from cover to cover, like some fans believe.

"The biggest gripe I have is when fans come over to me, making like they're real cool, and say, 'Hey Bill, what was it like working with [heel columnists] Dan Shocket and Eddie Ellner? Haha!' [They make it out] like I was them. Dan Shocket was a very young man who died from cancer, and Eddie Ellner is still around: he runs a company called Yoga Soup in California."

Ellner also made national news in 1996 when, as per his grandmother's wishes, he flew to New York to spread her ashes at Yankee Stadium after the New York Yankees won their first World Series in 18 years.

That last of these quibbles, a by-product of being the television face of the magazines – which really did have some fictional characters – and the staffer who travelled from territory to territory, is the one about which Apter is most quick to elaborate.

"I worked with some incredible people and incredible teams, like Stu Saks, Craig Peters, Brandi Mankiewicz, Gary Morgenstein, Bob Smith, Dan Shocket, and Eddie Ellner. Mainly, I did my columns, and I handled most of the photography and reporting for the people writing the stories. I was the guy out in the trenches, out in the field. And if a wrestler didn't like a story, and it had the name of, say, Gary Morgenstein on it? That wrestler also believed what the fans believed: that I was probably Gary Morgenstein. I got the heat for it!"

Keep in mind that there were times when London Publishing put out half-a-dozen different magazines at a time.

"One time, (noted pro wrestler and trainer) Les Thatcher said to me, after reading some of the stories, 'I'm not sure what Bill Apter's smoking, but I wish I could get some.' I never did any drugs and I never wrote all of those stories."

Still, even with all of that innuendo, after four-and-a-half decades in the business and with another 15 to add as a fan, Apter isn't jaded.

A suave young journalist gets an interview from Infernos manager JC Dykes

© BILL APTER ARCHIVE



ALL YOU NEED IS LOVE

In spite of being the subject of all sorts of strange rumours thanks to his role in pro wrestling folklore, you'll be hard-pressed to find someone who loves the sport as much as Bill Apter.

"My whole career, other than maybe when I was threatened by wrestlers – seriously! – I never thought about walking away. I always knew that if something happened where it would make me want to walk away from this, I would just go to another place in the business."

Never, not even for a moment, has he gotten fed up, or bored, or has in any way considered washing his hands of this beloved form of athletic entertainment.

"Every day, this business day is totally fresh to me, it really is. I can't wait to get up in the morning.

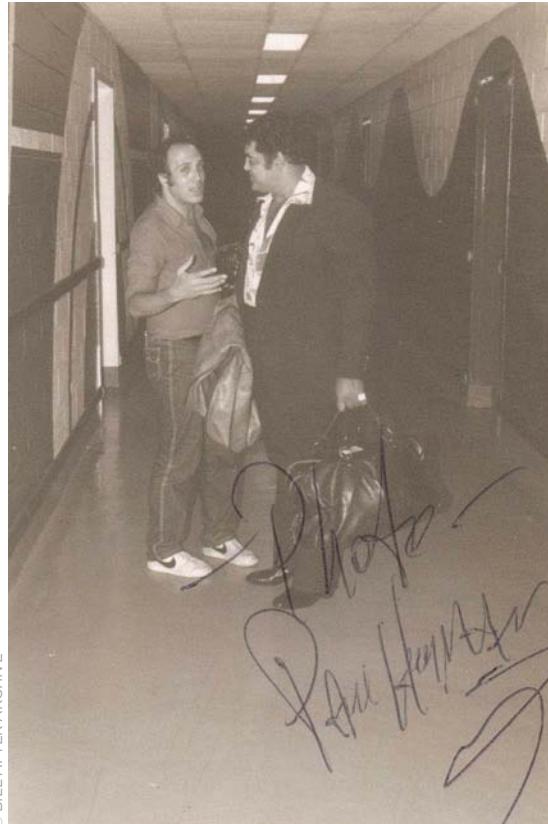
"You know, I juggle two careers every day, and I can't wait to get up, go online, and see what's going on in the wrestling business. Every day, there's something new going on, something positive or negative to talk about. And I love it. No, there hasn't been one day since I was a fan growing up that I haven't talked about it, for part of or the majority of my day. It's with me day and night.

"It's my mistress. Ask my wife, she'll tell you."

Sometimes, it throws him for a loop when he tries to step back and look at his life and career with some perspective.

"Lots of times – like now, as I just got booked in Brighton, England – I step back and say, 'This is amazing that I created my own niche back in 1970, and look at what I'm doing.' I'm still doing this! I've covered pro wrestling into sports entertainment, and I know people all the way back from Buddy Rogers to John Cena. I step back and go, 'My god, I can't believe that I'm the guy that people come to, to talk about this.' It's great because I was the biggest fan growing up, and I always wanted to be in this field, and it happened. I flowed with it, and it's still there. When people say, 'A few more years and you're gonna retire?' I say, 'Hell no! I don't ever want to retire from this. I love it!' And I think part of it is that I went from print to teaching myself the whole social media thing. At 1Wrestling.com, I was the first person on the wrestling-based internet who knew how to do video interviews. I broke ground on a lot of this in my

© BILL APTER ARCHIVE



@ThatOneWIGuy @ApterIWrestling I gotta get this. Every time I see a classic wrestling match, I see Bill Apter ringside taking pictures

This moment between Bill and Pedro Morales was captured by none other than Paul Heyman

career, and I can actually say I was a groundbreaker on that one as well."

That was far from his only first: as a young fan in 1970, he hosted the first pro wrestling radio show in the New York market, something that led to a long tradition of the genre in the media capital of the world. In 1985, he hosted the first pro wrestling home video released in the West, *Lords Of The Ring*. Early in his magazine career, he got what he describes as wrestling's first shoot interview, talking to Bruno Sammartino about his life story, including escaping the Nazis during World War II.

"FSM is filling a very important void because the magazines were always the lifeblood of the industry. Even today, as much stuff as people write online, when a wrestler sees themselves in a magazine, and especially on the cover, no matter how big a star that is it means more to them than anything." – BILL APTER

One area where Apter is relatively late to the game is in writing a book. He doesn't read a lot of wrestlers' books because he feels so many are angry, and it took some time to find his voice when writing about his own life story.

"I want the book to be fun for people. People are asking me, 'Did you talk about the trials and

tribulations of The British Bulldog?' No, not at all. This is not an exposé book. This is not about trouble I had with people – just two or three – but it's a lighthearted, fun book that people can just enjoy."

He took a different tack from most wrestling memoirs: instead of a chronological telling of his professional life story, it's a "bathroom read" of chapters out of chronological order that cover major moments in his career and his favourite stories. The process was to make a list of everything that he felt had an argument to make it into the book, which he then presented to various friends and peers.

"The Andy Kaufman/Jerry Lawler story was the one that everyone requested. More than any other story in the book, people wanted to hear that story from my side."

Apter famously made the connection between the two when Kaufman was rejected by the WWF, but one long-time friend went as far as to maybe give Bill a little *too much* credit:

"Jerry Lawler did the foreword for the book and said that if it wasn't for me, he would never have gotten on the radar of WWE."

"I don't believe that, but I was very flattered by it."

ENEMY OF THE STATE

As noted, in the 1980s, the family of magazines that Apter worked for was, to the WWF, an enemy of the state. WWF Magazine had launched, and just like that, outside publications were blocked from dealing with the wrestlers directly, or even securing ringside photography. Being that Apter considered himself a lifer at the magazines founded by Stanley Weston, he became resigned to the idea that he wouldn't fulfil the personal goal of appearing on WWF/E television. It was his home promotion, the one he'd followed since childhood, and for many years, changes in the wrestling business turned the dream into a lost cause.

Well, until the wrestling business changed again.

"There was no way [it could happen]. The person who was responsible for their publishing and their website was very passionate that we were the enemy, and that I was leading the forces. I never thought in my wildest dreams that one day, I would get a call from someone saying they're starting a WWE Network [and want me on their shows].

"The cherry on the top of this was that when the Network debuted, the first show was *WrestleMania Rewind*. In the history [portion], pre-*WrestleMania I*, 20 minutes into that show the day that the Network premiered, I was on there. Friends of mine at WWE were all calling me and saying, 'That's great! You finally made it.'"

Every day, Bill also gets a different, but uniquely fulfilling satisfaction from the non-wrestling side of his aforementioned dual career.

"The company is called AHEDD (pronounced 'ahead'), and it's a non-profit [organisation] dedicated to assisting people with various degrees of disabilities to find employment, benefits, counselling et cetera. And to go and help someone with a disability take the word 'dis-' off it and make it 'ability', to help them find a job and be successful, is a life-changing experience. Not just his or her life, but it trickles down to their family or whoever they're living with, their family... It's very rewarding."



© BILLAPTER ARCHIVE



A friend to the entire wrestling business, Bill here clowns around with the late Dusty Rhodes

Carrying on the tradition, Bill has an important role behind the scenes at FSM

Many of the over three-dozen people that make up Apter's caseload are wrestling fans, and he's used their shared interest to gain insight into how to successfully get one of them placed.

"A lot of that is really marketing, and I brought that to this. Instead of trying to market wrestlers in magazines or online, I'm marketing terrific people to employers to help them be successful.

"In a lot of ways, it's the same thing I'm doing when I do the wrestling full-time, but it's a different genre and different costumes. The end result is trying to make a successful product or a successful person out of this whole thing."

Whether it's Lex Luger as a rising star in Florida or one of the young men and women in his caseload, "packaging people for success" is what the incomparable Bill Apter has always been about.



Is Wrestling Fixed? I Didn't Know It Was Broken! will be available in paperback and e-book formats on October 13, 2015. Bill Apter will also be at the Brighton Film and Comic Con on November 7-8, where he will gladly sign copies of *FSM* or his new book. For more information, please visit FilmAndComicConBrighton.com



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When Orig Williams passed away in 2009, it left a hole not only in British pro wrestling, but in Welsh culture, too. John Lister discovers what made "El Bandito" a man who will be remembered for generations to come.

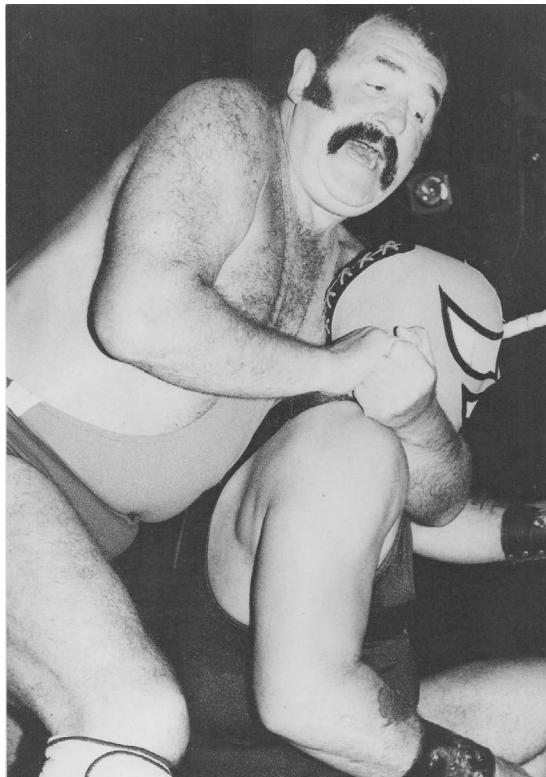
Greetings, Grapple Fans

ORIG WILLIAMS

"He was billed as El Bandito," said Eddie Hamill of the late Orig Williams, "and he was definitely a bandit. But he was the nice type of bandit!"

Williams was one of the biggest independent or "opposition" promoters of the ITV era, but to describe him solely in terms of his wrestling and promoting career would be a disservice to a man universally recognised in Welsh culture as a truly remarkable figure.

He grew up in the tiny village of Ysbyty Ifan in North Wales, which even today has a registered population of less than 200 people. Evidence of the rural nature of his upbringing comes in his uncle's profession: a collector of urine in order



© DARREN WARD ARCHIVE

Not only was Orig Williams a famous pro wrestler, but he was iconic in his home country of Wales

"As player-manager of Nantlle Vale, Williams was engaged in numerous physical incidents that would scarcely be believable if the press cuttings did not exist"

to provide ammonia to professional wool washers. (Redhead urine was the most productive, according to Williams' autobiography.)

Leaving school after the Second World War, Williams enrolled in the RAF, where he regularly fought both in official boxing and wrestling sessions, and in brawls in local towns while on leave. He then moved into professional football, spending time with Oldham Athletic and Shrewsbury Town before moving into the Welsh leagues, where the rules of the game proved no barrier to continuing to fight. As player-manager of Nantlle Vale, he was engaged in numerous physical incidents that would scarcely be believable if the press cuttings did not exist. Among the most notable were the time he was sent off just four minutes into a game, and the time his side's aggressive manner caused the opposing goalkeeper to simply walk out mid-match.

Things came to a head when one game was abandoned, and Williams was summoned to a disciplinary hearing at Rhyl Town Hall, which ironically would become his home venue as a promoter. He was given a six-month ban and threatened with permanent exclusion for a future offence. The punishment prompted him to seek an alternative career as a professional wrestler, having noticed that attendance at games was hit hard when wrestling was shown on ITV.

BOXING FOR BUSINESS

Although Williams turned pro thanks to contacts made via his former Army amateur coach, he initially struggled, and it was only legitimate combat in the boxing booths that helped him make a breakthrough. Although more than happy to take on all comers, he had to be coached in the art of "working for the nubbins"; in other words, to deliberately engineer an exciting contest that earned the crowd's approval. With the help of a bogus sob story from the ring announcer about how the fighters were unpaid amateurs and in need of money to support a family orphaned by a mining accident, such contests could encourage the crowd to donate in appreciation of the "hard-fought" victory. It proved a valuable lesson in the psychology of the wrestling business, something that Williams passed on to Klondyke Kate.

"Bobby Barron taught me the moves and gave me my start, but Orig taught me how to be the villain and tell a good story," noted Kate. "Cowboys and Indians still enthrals a crowd."

Williams' own education continued when he was invited to wrestle in Pakistan with the Bholus, a family

with genuine hero status in the country. He went on to spend several months living with the family. According to Peter Nulty, who went on to wrestle and referee for Williams as Jack "Flash" Davey, as well as being his business partner for many years, "the Bholus taught him everything he knew about promoting. We wouldn't always agree, and when I'd suggest something he didn't like, he'd start his reply, 'Akram [Bholu] once said... It didn't matter that it was 40 years ago Akram had said it!'"

The friendship continued with Williams bringing the entire family over for a successful UK tour aimed at fans in the Pakistani community, including a memorable show in Bradford where all five brothers were victorious. Williams was also brought in as referee for a memorable show in Pakistan where Akram took on Antonio Inoki. Reportedly disgruntled by an attempted deviation from the booked finish, Inoki wound up breaking Akram's arm, leaving a disappointed Williams to call an end to the bout.

During the initial tour, Williams met the behemoth Klondyke Bill who, along with his equally oversized and unkempt brother Klondyke Jake, was among the leading figures in his cast of characters, including women wrestlers and little people, who didn't fit into the more traditional sports-like roster of Joint Promotions. A BBC documentary as part of the *Philpott Files* series showed how the sheer size of the pair combined with the remote nature of many of the towns Williams ran allowed for some easy promotion: the "brothers" would simply walk around the town in the afternoon before a show, attracting the attention of local residents before explaining the reason for their visit.

Of all British promoters, Williams probably covered the widest territory. While he based himself in Wales (which, aside from Cardiff, Joint Promotions largely ignored), he also ran dates in parts of England and Scotland, as well as making regular tours of Ireland.

Between 1982 and 1995, he produced regular TV shows for S4C, the Welsh version of Channel 4, under the banner of *Reslo* (which translated simply as "wrestling"). He took advantage of the looser broadcasting standards to present more violent bouts than was seen on ITV, often with stipulations.

"He was still putting on a family show," Klondyke Kate explained, "but he liked you to show a bit more fighting spirit."

FOREIGN SOIL SCARES

Neither were the British Isles a limit to Williams: he promoted shows around the world, from British army bases in Europe to tours of the Middle East and Africa. This led to numerous hair-raising incidents, such as dangerous overcrowding at a Nigerian show run by the infamous Power Mike where, having run out of printed tickets to sell, staff simply handed out blank pieces of paper to be accepted as passes, something that perhaps inevitably led to mass "counterfeiting".

Then there was a show in Turkey where fans were enraged, though accounts vary as to what exactly upset them and who was responsible. One version has it that promoters had attracted great interest by billing women and, seeing a sell-out crowd, decided to hold off their appearance until a second show.

© DARREN WARD ARCHIVE



A young Orig Williams transitioned to pro wrestling after disciplinary problems in football

The *Reslo* programme was a staple of Welsh language channel S4C between 1987 and 1995

S4C

Another has it that a top star was falsely billed as being injured but ready to fight the following evening, only for the same trick to be attempted the next night. Every version of the tale has the same ending, however: Williams and company fleeing for their lives after fans literally set the timber stadium on fire.

Indeed, it seemed that wherever Williams promoted, incident was sure to follow, as Tony St. Clair recalled of one trip to Zimbabwe.

"Flying over, I got upgraded to first class, which seemed great until I went to the bathroom and discovered about a square foot of the padding was missing and you could see straight to the outside of the plane. I told Mark Rocco about this, so he had a look and then complained to the stewardess, saying, 'This is dreadful.' She replied 'Well, what can I do?' Mark then asked what films were playing, and she said, 'Films? You're lucky we're in the air!'

"We then did the tour and went to a big reception one night. Most of the wrestlers were sat together, and then Orig Williams was on the top table with Otto Wanz, [CWA matchmaker] Peter William and then Robert Mugabe and his wife. They were chatting away all night; about what, who knows?

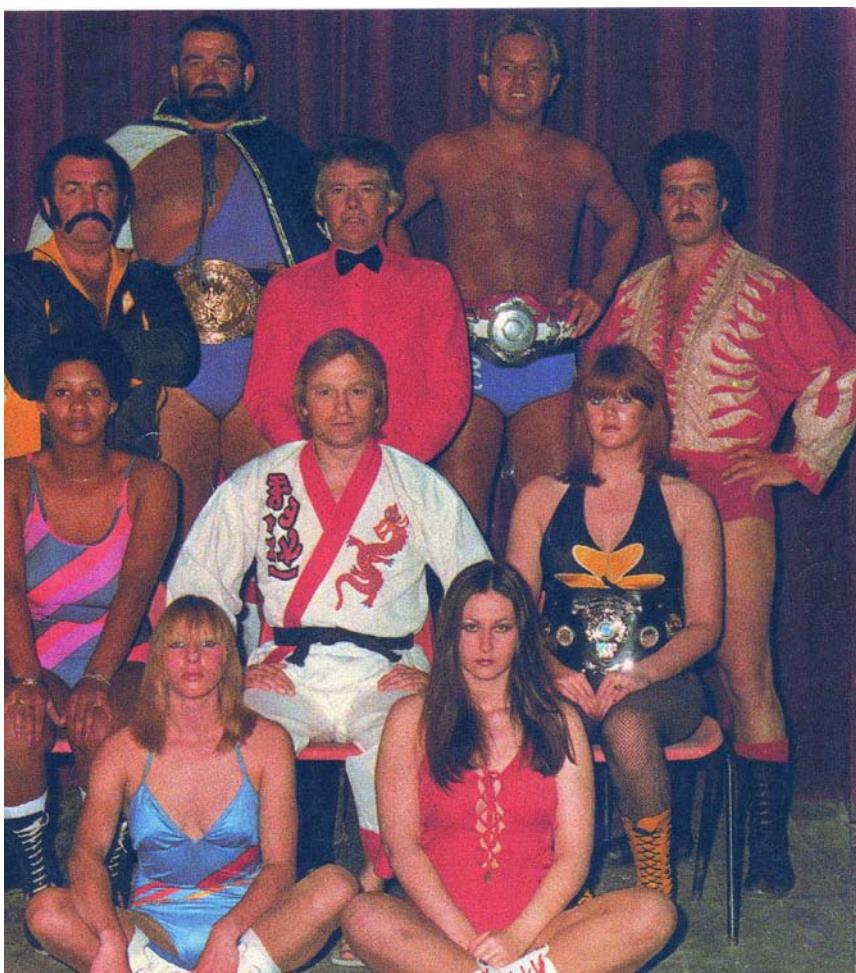
"Then we came to the flight back, and directly after take-off, the cabin filled with smoke and the warning signs came on. Mark, Danny [Collins] and I downed a bottle of vodka inside five minutes. We had an emergency landing, but it took about 20 minutes because they had to dump fuel to make it safe.

"The airline staff then told us they would put us on their other plane. Not another plane, but the other plane. About three hours later, we took off, and after five minutes it had problems. There was no smoke this time, but it must have been more serious because

Orig Williams, Pat Roach, John Lees and Gordon Corbett flank a Turkish promoter on a tour of the country



© DARREN WARD ARCHIVE



Tony St. Clair (in blue tights) and Eddie Hamill (in white) recalled Williams' social appetite after shows had ended

we landed straight away. We then had to spend an extra three days in Zimbabwe waiting for them to get a working plane."

UNEXTENDED INVITATION

In the early years of his career, Williams certainly was not above pulling a few strokes.

"He'd do anything to make money," recalled "Kung Fu" Eddie Hamill. "He'd print up posters with [the names of] McManus and Pallo in big letters, and you had to read very carefully to see the small writing to see it was *Mike McManus and Jimmy Pallo*."

"Other times, he'd list the right name but put 'are invited to appear' – that was a good one! When the show started, he'd announce that they'd been invited but refused to show up. That was pretty embarrassing when you were an unknown youngster and you'd have to go out in the first match and face the crowd after that."

Over the years, Williams mellowed a little in his approach to pulling a crowd, largely because he began running venues regularly, and realised you could only fool an audience once before disappointing them. Klondyke Kate confirmed that by the 1980s he was "running a very legitimate, very lucrative business." That said, around the turn of the century, he was among those promoters running shows with wrestlers portraying knock-offs of popular WWF performers, dubiously justifying the presentation not as an attempt to deceive fans, but as a "tribute" show in the same manner as happens in the music world.

To be fair to Williams, he was certainly the victim of some shady practices himself, particularly in Ireland. It became almost a running joke when running small buildings in the Republic that venue owners would demand a last-minute price hike, knowing that Williams would get the blame from an angry crowd if the show didn't go ahead. Things were even worse further north, as Kate recalled.

"We'd have shows where the IRA would turn up, demand the takings and even the raffle money, and then leave us to carry on with the show. It was quite surreal!"

A DRINKER AND A FIGHTER

Peter Nulty explained that Williams was also renowned for his aggressive style in the ring.

"Deep down he was a drinker and a fighter. He loved to hurt people. He wasn't a bully and expected you to hit him back just as hard, but it was a case of defend yourself at all times.

"His stumps were like being hit with a concrete block: if he stomped you once, you made sure to grab his foot before he did it a second time."

There was a famous incident in which Williams came off worse, however, opposite Tony St. Clair.

"I used to throw punches that, shall I say, sometimes connected and sometimes didn't," said St. Clair. "This time he was getting all excited and leaned in a bit too far, and I threw the punch a little too far, and I cracked him right on the nose. He slowly toppled over, then looked up at me shocked and said, 'You can't do that! I'm the fucking promoter!'"

The old cliché about hard but fair certainly applied to Williams. On one occasion, a disgruntled wrestler suckerpunched a rival in a hotel bar after a show. Williams was not upset by the fact that two colleagues had fought in public, but rather that one had taken an unfair advantage. He ordered the pair to meet in his garage the next day to settle their differences in a fair fight.

And with fighting out the way, it was time for the drinking.

"We always had to make sure the show was finished before last orders," explained Hamill. "Orig couldn't go to bed without a pint. The first thing after the show was the pub, never going back to where you were sleeping. It only took him two pints to get pissed, but he was always a happy pissed fellow."

That said, Adrian Street remembered Williams getting into a heated argument with a talking macaw in a hotel bar. The bird had the temerity not only to ape Williams' solo rendition of *Danny Boy*, but then to repeat back Williams's ensuing curses.

Nulty said that the pub sessions were a key part of Williams' operation.

"He would never shy away from the lads: there was never any 'them and me'. Some of the trips to Ireland were notoriously long, like 32 shows in 28 days, so drinking was part of making us one big, happy family to survive the stresses. Sometimes a wrestler would come on tour and not get on with everyone else in the pub, and they'd never be invited back again."

Drinking was in turn a gateway for Williams' other big love: talking.

"He loved to speak to people," said Nulty. "He was never happier than in a little backstreet pub where

he'd wind up chatting to a couple of random old men about the old times.

"He'd phone me every day, and if I missed a call, he'd leave a message saying, 'I need to speak to you urgently!' When I called back, it would turn out he just wanted a chat."

It wasn't just wrestling that Williams could talk about, as St. Clair stressed.

"The first time I met him in Roy 'Bull' Davies' pub, we didn't speak a single word about wrestling: it was all football, which was a common interest."

"He was very intelligent," according to Kate. "He could talk about anything. Unlike some people in wrestling, he'd always read and listen to things to keep up with what was happening in the world, right until he died."

"I'd left school at 15 to become a wrestler, and after I had my first child I decided to take a break to go back and finish my education with GCSEs, A-Levels and even a degree. Even though that meant missing shows, Orig totally supported me because he knew there'd be a time for me after wrestling - I'm just lucky that time turned out to be way down the line. He taught everyone not to be just a one trick pony with wrestling, but to get out and experience life."

CULTURAL CURIOSITY

Williams certainly did that towards the end of his career, and beyond. He took a keen interest in Welsh culture and current affairs, and even took up a regular column in *The Daily Post*, titled *Siarad Plaen* ("plain speaking") where he shared his uncompromising views on life and politics. Editor Rob Irvine later noted that "he certainly did speak as he found, even if that left myself and the lawyers twitching a little as the paper went to press."

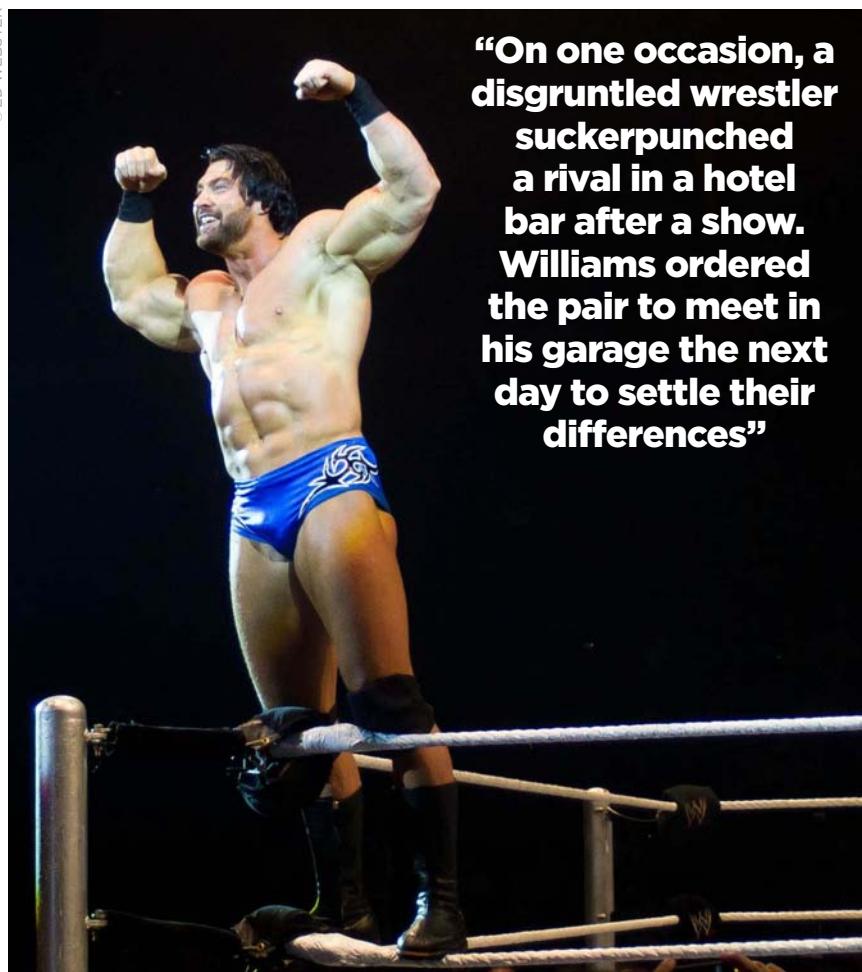
As his own in-ring career took over, Williams supported the next generation of both family and business. His daughter Tara Bethan became a singer and actress, appearing on the BBC contest *I'd Do Anything* and taking on a regular role in S4C's flagship soap opera *Pobol y Cwm* (*People Of The Valley*). Meanwhile, Williams championed a young recruit in Barri Griffiths, who first became Goliath on *Gladiators* and later Mason Ryan in WWE, signing his developmental deal shortly before Williams' death. Nulty confirmed that "Orig was so proud of Barri. Finding a Welsh heavyweight with the potential to make it big on the world stage was one of the highlights of his career."

Another of Williams' proudest honours was being named to the Gorsedd y Beirdd (Community of the Bards), a select group of poets, artists and others who have made a noted contribution to Welsh language and culture. Taking a keen interest in poetry himself, William's final words before dying from a heart condition in 2009 were to recite poetry by the Welsh language writer Cynan.

A reported 500 people attended Williams' funeral, an event Kate stated was "the saddest I've ever been to. As much as it was meant to be a celebration of his life, to see how much people loved him and missed him was devastating."

"I still go to wrestling at his old base of Rhyd Town Hall, and the people there still think of him as being there," added Eddie Hamill, who is among those for

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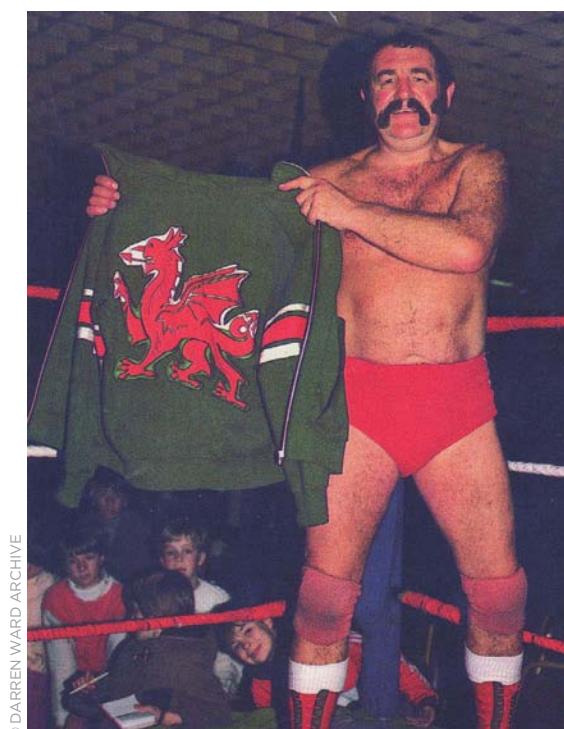


"On one occasion, a disgruntled wrestler suckerpunched a rival in a hotel bar after a show. Williams ordered the pair to meet in his garage the next day to settle their differences"

whom Williams remains sorely missed. "He loved wrestling, but I think he could have done anything. He just had that personality, and had ideas, and was such a big character."

"He'd done things you wouldn't think people could do."

Williams got his wish to see a Welshman wrestle for WWE when Barri Griffiths signed for the group in 2009



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- **FSM** examines the life of the incomparable Mad Dog Vachon

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- In an incendiary interview, Ryback lays out his plans for 2014

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- **FSM** looks back at the career of Bray Wyatt, prior to his match with John Cena at WrestleMania
- How pay-per-view may be a thing of the past thanks to WWE Network
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- How ECW's The Night The Line Was Crossed was a watershed moment for the Philadelphia group
- **FSM** profiles the patriarch of the Knight family, Ricky Knight

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- Shawn Michaels chats about the lesser-known stories in his career
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- Now that Shinsuke Nakamura has grabbed worldwide attention, **FSM** examines his life and career
- New fans may know him only from NXT, but **FSM** explains how William Regal is the UK's finest all-rounder

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- **FSM** previews pro wrestling's biggest show of 2015, WrestleMania by signing a new deal with WWE
- **FSM** investigates the crisis in commentary, especially in WWE
- **FSM** examines the success of Charlotte, and ponders if she'll be brought up to the main roster
- Bobby Lashley tells **FSM** why he's better than he ever was in WWE
- **FSM** talks to Dave Taylor, in another amazing Greetings, Grappling Fans

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- **FSM** talks to CM Punk to find out how's adapted to a new life
- **FSM** talks to those who know Luke Harper to establish that he has all the tools to make it to the top
- **FSM** examines the In Your House series
- **FSM** ponders whether mat-based wrestling can hit the mainstream

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- **FSM** talks to Kurt Angle about some lesser-discussed topics in his career
- **FSM** strays the language barrier to converse with former IWGP champion Kazuchika Okada
- **FSM** examines the hold Jimmy Havoc has on PROGRESS Wrestling

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- As John Cena elevates the U.S. title, **FSM** examines the role of the veteran
- **FSM** investigates Kevin Owens' rapid rise to the top in WWE
- William Regal explains to **FSM** what it is that WWE is looking for in NXT talent
- Now that he has recovered from injury, **FSM** ponders the future for ROH star Adam Cole
- In a two-part piece, **FSM** documents the history of Joint Promotions

ISSUE 121 - AUG 2015

- **FSM** polls its readers to discover why they are turning out of Raw
- With every show on the Network, **FSM** presents the definitive list of the top 50 WWE PPVs of All-Time
- **FSM** asks Eric Bischoff to go into detail on the beginnings of Monday Nitro
- In the last of a two-part article, **FSM** documents the history of British powerhouse Joint Promotions
- **FSM** talks to Ricky Steamboat to get his advice for young wrestlers

ISSUE 122 - SEPT 2015

- **FSM** interviews Sting to find out more about wrestling's enigmatic legend
- **FSM** waves lyrical about the life of the late "Rowdy" Roddy Piper
- **FSM** ponders what's next for Hulk Hogan following his railrow
- "The Million Dollar Man" tells **FSM** how he became the sport's greatest heel
- Nikki Storm sends **FSM** her diary from three months' living in Japan
- **FSM** talks to Tony St. Clair about a career that took him across the world

INFORMATION: - Blu-ray Region: Region B • Distributor: Fremantle Media • Price: £22.99 • Runtime: 397 minutes • Release: Out now • Weblink: www.WWEDVD.co.uk

WWE THE KLIQ RULES

BLURAY DISC



Shawn Michaels, Triple-H, Kevin Nash, Scott Hall and Sean Waltman were the five men behind the most influential and controversial backstage collective in professional wrestling history, and "The Kliq" – as they were dubbed by Davey Boy Smith and Lex Luger – is chronicled in this WWE Blu-ray set.

The main documentary feature only runs for just over an hour, so the story of the group feels a little rushed, but the main takeaway is more of the impact that The Kliq had on pro wrestling in the mid-to-late-1990s, both positive and negative. With a very minimalistic voiceover, the story is largely told by the Kliq members in backstage interviews, as well as various segments where they joke with each other in the build-up to Nash's induction into the WWE Hall of Fame.

Each member tells the story of how they came together, starting with Michaels meeting Hall while in the AWA, to when Nash and Triple-H were hired from WCW. The Kliq's notorious politicking is brought up, with various critics of the group, such as Bret Hart and Shane Douglas, explaining why they felt it was doing damage to the World Wrestling Federation. The Kliq members admit that their intentions were not entirely with the entire roster in mind, and they clarify why they behaved the way they did at the time.

A key portion of the documentary is dedicated to the Madison Square Garden "curtain call" incident in May 1996, which saw Michaels, Triple-H, Hall and Nash break character in public as the latter duo prepared to depart for WCW. The fans responsible for filming the incident are interviewed for the documentary, and Vince McMahon discusses his feelings as it went along, and how he learnt from it in regards to the "shades of grey" characters that made up the Attitude Era.

The rest of the film discusses how The Kliq broke up, with Hall, Nash and Waltman running amok in WCW – this is described by Eric Bischoff in fresh interview footage – while Michaels and Triple-H had McMahon's ear in the WWF, and how each group pushed each other to perform better in their respective companies. The film ends with The Kliq reuniting in recent years, with Triple-H's executive role in WWE being partly responsible for them having a more favourable image today, despite their infamous reputation.

RULERS OF THE RING

The Kliq's backstage machinations notwithstanding, the group members backed



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2



3

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their ego up in the ring, and *The Kliq Rules* features many of the faction's best matches alongside and against each other. The set starts with Waltman's upset victory over Razor Ramon on *Raw*, and builds up to Michaels and Ramon's Intercontinental championship Ladder match at 1994's *WrestleMania X*. A bout from the short-lived *Action Zone* programme sees Ramon and The 1-2-3 Kid square off against Michaels and Diesel, leading to Diesel's turn on Michaels at *Survivor Series*. With no exaggeration, it is one of the great WWE tag team matches of all-time.

An absurd *In Your House VI* "Cry Baby match" between Ramon and The 1-2-3 Kid is included, as is Michaels and Diesel's entertaining WWF championship brawl from *In Your House VII*. Triple-H enters the fray with early *Raw* matches against Ramon and Michaels, before the aforementioned Madison Square Garden incident is replayed in full. The set then includes a couple of WCW bouts, with The Outsiders facing the Steiner Brothers on *Nitro*, and then Hall battling Nash at *Halloween Havoc 1998*.

Three contests from the last 15 years see the WWE incarnation of the New World Order against Hulk Hogan, Kane and The Rock on *Smackdown*; Triple-H defending the World heavyweight championship against Nash at *Judgment Day 2003*; and D-Generation X's TLC encounter with Chris Jericho and The Big Show from *TLC 2009*. Four further matches are included as Blu-ray exclusives: Hall and Syxx against Harlem Heat from *Nitro*; Nash versus The Rock from *Smackdown*; a Ladder match between Triple-H and Nash from *TLC 2011*; and Triple-H's showdown with Sting at *WrestleMania XXXI*, with heavy Kliq participation.

While there isn't any brand new information in the documentary, it's a fun tale of friendship and political navigation in a high-pressure working environment, and the collection of matches is enough to make *The Kliq Rules* a fine purchase.

MARTIN BENTLEY

1. WWE Hall of Famer Scott Hall is interviewed for a short but interesting documentary 2. Kevin Nash had a tremendous amount of backstage influence, especially as WWF champion 3. In various guises, Sean Waltman features heavily on the Blu-ray extras

"A bout from the short-lived Action Zone sees Razor Ramon and The 1-2-3 Kid square off against Michaels and Diesel in a bout that is, with no exaggeration, one of the great WWE tag matches of all-time"

INFORMATION: - DVD Region: Region Free • Distributor: PWG • Price: \$14.99 • Runtime: 144mins / 124mins • Release: Out now • Weblink: www.ProWrestlingGuerrilla.com

© HARRY AARON



1

© LARRY CARLIN

PWG MYSTERY VORTEX III: ROCK AND SHOCK THE NATION / THREEMENDOUS IV

© LARRY CARLIN



Mystery Vortex III, the third Pro Wrestling Guerrilla card to feature an unadvertised line-up, conjures plenty of surprises, not to mention a major shock at the end of the show.

Johnny Gargano and Tommaso Ciampa meet in the opening bout, and the two set the evening's standard with their intensity and physicality. In a re-match from DDT4, Monster Mafia take on The World's Cutest Tag Team, where Josh Alexander and Ethan Page make life difficult for Candice LeRae and Joey Ryan, but Page has problems keeping his attention away from *Modern Family* star Sofia Vergara at ringside.

Timothy Thatcher faces off with Biff Busick in a match that will divide opinion. Heavy on groundwork, it goes against the usual PWG fare, but Thatcher's mat control is amongst the best in the world, and Busick is great fighting from underneath. Roderick Strong's open challenge for his PWG World championship is answered by "Speedball" Mike Bailey, whose kick-based arsenal troubles the title-holder. Bailey shows why he's one to watch right now, with Strong adding this bout to his great year's work. John Silver then has the unenviable task of trying to match Brian Cage for sheer strength, but surprises everyone, producing a match more fun than it looks on paper.

MYSTERY THEATRE

The main in-ring highlight pits Chris Hero against Zack Sabre Jr, with the Brit targeting Hero's injured finger, which gets sickening at times. Hero answers back with his famed elbows and kicks, severely testing Sabre Jr's durability. It's a technical battle that gets more violent than you might anticipate.

Andrew Everett and Trevor Lee defend the PWG Tag Team titles against The Young Bucks in the main event, with the usual insanity that comes with a match involving Matt and Nick Jackson. Everett and Lee hold up their end of the bargain, and the

1. PWG World champion Roderick Strong smashes Trevor Lee with a kick at Mystery Vortex 2. Johnny Gargano struggles with Brian Cage's strength at Threemendous IV 3. Akira Tozawa fails to spare his friend Ricochet from his high-impact offence in their singles bout

"The main in-ring highlight pits Chris Hero against Zack Sabre Jr, with the Brit targeting Hero's injured finger, which gets sickening at times. It's a technical battle that gets more violent than you might anticipate"

night ends with the return of a major figure from PWG history, cast in a new role.

The Reseda outfit follows up by celebrating its 12th anniversary with the fourth instalment of *Threemendous*. The festivities commence with The World's Cutest Tag Team facing Team Tremendous. This match is riotous fun, highlighted by Candice LeRae's interactions with Bill Carr. Brian Cage then squares off with Johnny Gargano, and the size difference is countered early with Gargano getting the jump on his opponent. Still, it isn't long before Cage rag-dolls Gargano around the ring.

More of a high-flying bout follows, as Andrew Everett faces Rich Swann. Everett's chops leave a lot to be desired, but he makes up for it with his aerial ability, which new NXT recruit Swann is more than able to match. Everett's tag team partner Trevor Lee battles Tommaso Ciampa in an even contest tipped by Ciampa's use of the ring apron. Lee's comebacks are a part of his rise through PWG, and the match builds to an exciting finish.

Chris Hero takes on "Speedball" Mike Bailey, who seeks to cut Hero down to size with his kicks, while Hero uses his size to dominate the Canadian. Bailey is already one of PWG's most popular young stars, and Hero is arguably in the best form of his career.

Akira Tozawa returns to take on Ricochet, in a great example of two wrestlers who know each other inside out. The Japanese grappler shows that he hasn't forgotten the PWG fans in this very good match-up. Following this, Super Dragon and The Young Bucks invade and pillage the majority of the roster in an outstanding scene of violence.

The Young Bucks remain at ringside to defend their PWG Tag Team titles against Jack Evans and the debuting Angelico. The Jacksons more than meet their match with the duo, and it takes some scheming to get any sort of advantage.

It's a fitting main event that perfectly illustrates why PWG is the world's hottest indy promotion.

MARTIN BENTLEY

INFORMATION: - DVD Region: Region Free • Distributor: TIDAL Wrestling • Price: £10 each • Runtime: 97mins / 111mins • WEBSITE: www.tinyurl.com/TIDALFSM

TIDAL WRESTLING WIPEOUT 2015 / FOOLS RUSH IN



TIDAL Championship Wrestling's first Leeds show of 2015 brings some changes, a major one being the use of a six-sided ring. This is given a difficult test to kick off February 8's *Wipeout*, as two big men, Joe Coffey and Rampage

Brown, do battle. Coffey displays the spirit and determination that fans of ICW are familiar with, and he proves to be the former TCW champion's equal in this contest.

Submission specialist Sean Only takes on Danny O'Doherty, with the uncouth newcomer bending the rules frequently. In a match with no count-outs, Nixon Newell and Violet O'Hara take advantage of the free rein to punish each other outside the ring. O'Hara enters this bout with an injury, which makes her performance even more impressive.

TIDAL's use of the six-sided ring is designed to contain a huge tag team war as Dave Mastiff and T-Bone face Damian O'Connor and Wolfgang, however even this structure cannot withstand their heavy artillery, as the middle rope breaks on a high-impact Irish Whip. Even this doesn't affect the quality of the battle, as four of the UK's best behemoths batter each other throughout.

After a quick squash involving oddball tag team Ward 13, Grado returns to TCW following a couple of cancelled appearances, facing off with "The Real Deal" Mark Coffey. The TCW commentators admit that Grado has deliberately been given a tough opponent due to the missed dates, but the Scot limits his comedy here, and puts in a good effort. A fun three-way is next, featuring El Ligero, Kay Lee Ray and Mike Bird. There's some early humour with Bird and Ligero, but Kay Lee kickstarts the action, and the match builds to a great conclusion.

The main event sees Liam Lazarus defending the TCW title against "Flash" Morgan Webster, in a clash of two of Britain's most promising young stars. Lazarus kicks off his title reign in impressive fashion, while Webster threatens to topple him with his stylish offence. The local fans are behind Lazarus, though by the end of the show they're left impressed with Webster's skills.

WON'T GET FOOLED AGAIN

March 22's *Fools Rush In* demonstrates TIDAL's ability to cycle its roster, keeping things fresh. Several names appear that weren't around there in February, and there are a few debuts, too.

Mixed tag team action kicks things off, with Dan James and Ruby Summers forming a very uneasy alliance against Peace and Nina Samuels. James gets particularly rough with his female opponent here, which doesn't sit well with Summers. This is followed by another intergender



bout, with Addy Starr facing JD Boom. The eccentric Boom uses conniving tactics to throw the Canadian off her game, but Starr does not take kindly to them, laying into him heavily.

The Fabulous Bakewell Boys debut in TIDAL, taking on Chris Brookes and Tyler Bate. Jerry and Steakley Bakewell usually compete in Lucha Britannia, and they offer something completely different here, though that results in a fun encounter. Sean Only continues his rise up the TIDAL card as he faces Josh Bodom, a name familiar to fans of Revolution Pro Wrestling. Bodom impresses in his venture north, and Only engages him in a physical style over the course of the bout.

The Proven and So Scandalous meet in a rematch from their great contest at *Silent Nightmare*, and this is a worthy sequel, as Caz Crash and Sam Wilder gun for revenge over Damian Dunne and Ryan Smile, who battle to prove that their victory in the first bout wasn't a fluke. Pete Dunne then takes on Joseph Conners in a very good mat battle, escalating when they poke each other in the eye, after which Conners resorts to further heel tactics.

Liam Lazarus defends the TIDAL championship against Martin Kirby in the main event, with Lazarus angry that Kirby had stolen his flask of tea earlier in the night. Once they get that nonsense out of the way, the match settles down into a fine title bout, with Kirby using his experience to counteract the younger Lazarus' spirited comebacks.

All in all, *Wipeout* is a variety show offering some of the best talent in the UK, as well as some rising stars, and is an easy watch on DVD. *Fools Rush In* shows TIDAL to really be finding its groove.

MARTIN BENTLEY

"The six-sided ring is designed to contain a huge tag team war as Dave Mastiff and T-Bone face Damian O'Connor and Wolfgang, however even this ring cannot withstand their heavy artillery, as the middle rope breaks on a high-impact Irish Whip"



1. Damian O'Connor and Dave Mastiff go head-to-head in a tag match at *Wipeout* **2.** 18-year-old Tyler Bate impresses at *Fools Rush In* **3.** Along with partner Chris Brookes, Ryan Smile aims to show that a previous victory over The Proven was no fluke

PROGRESS CHAPTER 20: THUNDERBASTARD – BEYOND THUNDERBASTARD

INFORMATION – Distributor: PROGRESS Wrestling • Price: £4.99 per month subscription • Runtime: 176 mins • Weblink: www.PROGRESSWrestling.com



It had been a long 609 days since Jimmy Havoc captured the PROGRESS title at *Chapter 10*, in a bout where he used the open contract previously offered to him by company spokesman Jim Smallman. For much of this time, Will Ospreay had seemed his biggest threat, and this July 26 *Thunderbastard* card finally pairs them in singles competition.

“Pastor” William Eaver and Noam Dar kick off the Electric Ballroom show. Dar is well established as one of the UK’s most popular wrestlers, and he largely controls the match. Eaver’s religious character is outlandish but likewise beloved, and with a little more seasoning he could become a major player. It’s a satisfactory beginning to proceedings. Morgan Webster, Kyle Ashmore, Mike Hitchman and Bubblegum then compete in a four-way fought under single fall rules, and there are plenty of close finishes in this pacy affair. Ashmore is outstanding, utilising a mesmeric athletic style, and Bubblegum is a hoot with his crafty Manchester ways irritating the capital crowd. Sebastian versus Damian Dunne follows in the Natural

Progression tournament, and while the bout is slow and deliberate, with Dunne dishing out a sustained beating, it’s a great old-school contest with enough contemporary manoeuvres to keep things engaging.

The Hunter Brothers challenge Tommy End and Michael Dante for their PROGRESS Tag Team titles, and Jim and Lee use speed to outwit their heavy-hitting opponents. Of course, this doesn’t last long, and Dante is soon throwing them about with ease, while End batters them with his vicious kickboxing offence, in what ends up a sterling battle. Nathan Cruz is then at his grotesque best on the microphone, antagonising the audience before the Thunderbastard match that also features El Ligero, Mark Haskins, Eddie Dennis, Rampage Brown, Tom Irvin, Marty Scurll and Damon Moser. It is essentially a Royal Rumble with eliminations via pinfall, and it’s all action, with several different storylines playing out. Brown and Ligero are outstanding, but it’s the closing moments featuring Cruz, Haskins and Scurll that really make it special.

Finally, it’s down to Havoc and Ospreay. A sensational video package chronicling Havoc’s reign, set to the Guns’N’Roses



© ROBB BRAZIER PHOTO.COM

1. Chaos and violence rule the main event between Jimmy Havoc and Will Ospreay

track *There Was A Time*, sets the tone for what is pro wrestling drama at its finest. Fought under No Disqualification rules, it’s a 30-minute stormer featuring rough brawling, stunning athleticism, weapons, and liberal interference that adds to the match instead of taking away from it.

It’s become somewhat of a cliché that PROGRESS shows aren’t to be missed, but *Beyond Thunderbastard* is the next step forward for one of Europe’s top promotions.

COLIN HOLMES

*NB. A live report, including spoilers, can be found on the **FSM** website here: www.tinyurl.com/PROGRESS20*

MCW CROWNING A CHAMPION

INFORMATION – Distributor: Melbourne City Wrestling • Price: £3.99 (to stream) / £5.99 (to keep) • Runtime: 116 mins • Weblink: <http://tinyurl.com/MCW Crown>



Essendon is a suburb of Melbourne, Australia that acts as the home of the MCW arena, which played host to the crowning of Melbourne City Wrestling’s first Intercommonwealth champion on August 8.

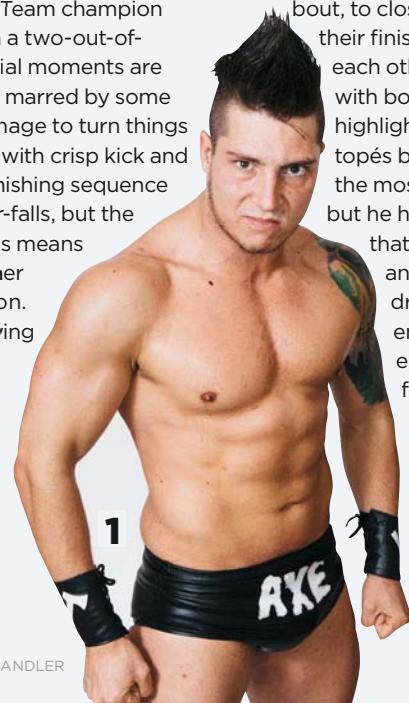
The opening contest of *Crowning A Champion* features Davis Storm, accompanied by Tommy Hellfire, challenging MCW heavyweight champion Elliot Sexton, who uses his weight and strength advantage to negate Storm’s speed. An easy victory seems to be in order for the champion until Hellfire interjects himself into the bout, allowing Storm to take control with a barrage of hit-and-run style manoeuvres. The contest ends in a pleasing back-and-forth effort, giving scope for a Hellfire versus Sexton battle down the line.

Josh Shooter and Fox Grinder versus Hard Way Inc. follows up in a grudge match, brought about after Shooter turned on his Hard Way Inc. partners, costing them the

MCW Tag Team titles. It’s a rough brawl that maintains a good level of intensity throughout, and the only downsides are a cheap ending and Hard Way’s valet, Miami, taking a really risky powerbomb through a table.

Former SHIMMER Tag Team champion Kellie Skater faces Evie in a two-out-of-three falls match. The initial moments are disappointingly slow and marred by some over-selling, but they manage to turn things around in the second fall with crisp kick and punch exchanges. The finishing sequence includes great, close near-falls, but the result feels like an obvious means to continue the feud, rather than offer a real conclusion.

After a disjointed showing from Los Luchas and The Estate, Marcus Pitt attacks JXT prior to their encounter. Pitt executes a plethora of Lesnar-esque German suplexes, and only a desperate



move that ends up with Pitt straddling the top rope allows JXT to recover. This is a really excellent seesaw battle, with both men showing great promise for the future.

Dowie James versus Mr Juicy is the aforementioned Intercommonwealth title

bout, to close the event. Both go for their finishing holds early, but cancel each other out. It’s an intense battle with both men taking risks, the highlight of which is a set of three topés by James. Juicy may not be the most athletic of competitors, but he has an engaging presence that the fans get fully behind, and that heightens a truly dramatic ending to an entertaining event that can either be streamed or kept for an affordable price.

COLIN HOLMES

1. Recent IPW:UK competitor Josh Shooter is here engaged in a tag team grudge match

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THE TRAINING GROUND

If you want to be a professional wrestler, there is no substitute for learning your craft at a respected school, but that doesn't mean that you can't pick up some important food for thought right here in **FSM**. The Training Ground will be here each month to offer you the benefit of the experience of various veterans of the sport.

SEVEN QUESTIONS WITH...

WRESTLER, PROMOTER AND MATRIARCH OF THE KNIGHT FAMILY, SARAYA KNIGHT

What's been the biggest change in women's wrestling since you started in the early-1990s?

It's gone from years ago when big girls used to just beat on little girls, and it was all very suggestive. These big, big girls would do the Big Daddy sort of stuff.

I started out training learning more technical wrestling and submissions, but there wasn't really any place for it in female wrestling. As I started getting better at the job, I started introducing a British technical influence into it, and it kind of progressed. Now with the women, some are better than the men, and they can do anything that a man can do. Years ago, there was a set distinction: there was women's wrestling and men's wrestling, but nowadays it blurs and women are doing the moves just as good, if not better, than the men, so the transition has been absolutely amazing.

The only difference [between the sexes] is tits and ass. We have to wear skimpies and the blokes have to wear a one-piece. There is no difference except that I'd say the women are more violent! There are so many women now cajoling for places, which is something the men have had for years; there's so many male wrestlers and only so many jobs, and it's partly gone the way now that there's more female wrestlers than there is work out there. Look at how many female wrestling companies there are now. There's so many female wrestlers out there now that it's like with the blokes: you get the good, the bad and the ugly.

The women have really had to step up to the plate: given the choice between going to a male show and a female show, I'd go to the female show every day of the week, because the girls hit harder!

Should there be any difference in the mechanics of training men and women?

I train men and women in exactly the same way. In fact, I take it harder on the women because I like the women to definitely be able to suck it up.

When I was brought into the business, I was trained by Ricky Knight, Jimmy Ocean,

After 25 years in the business, Saraya Knight remains a pre-eminent competitor



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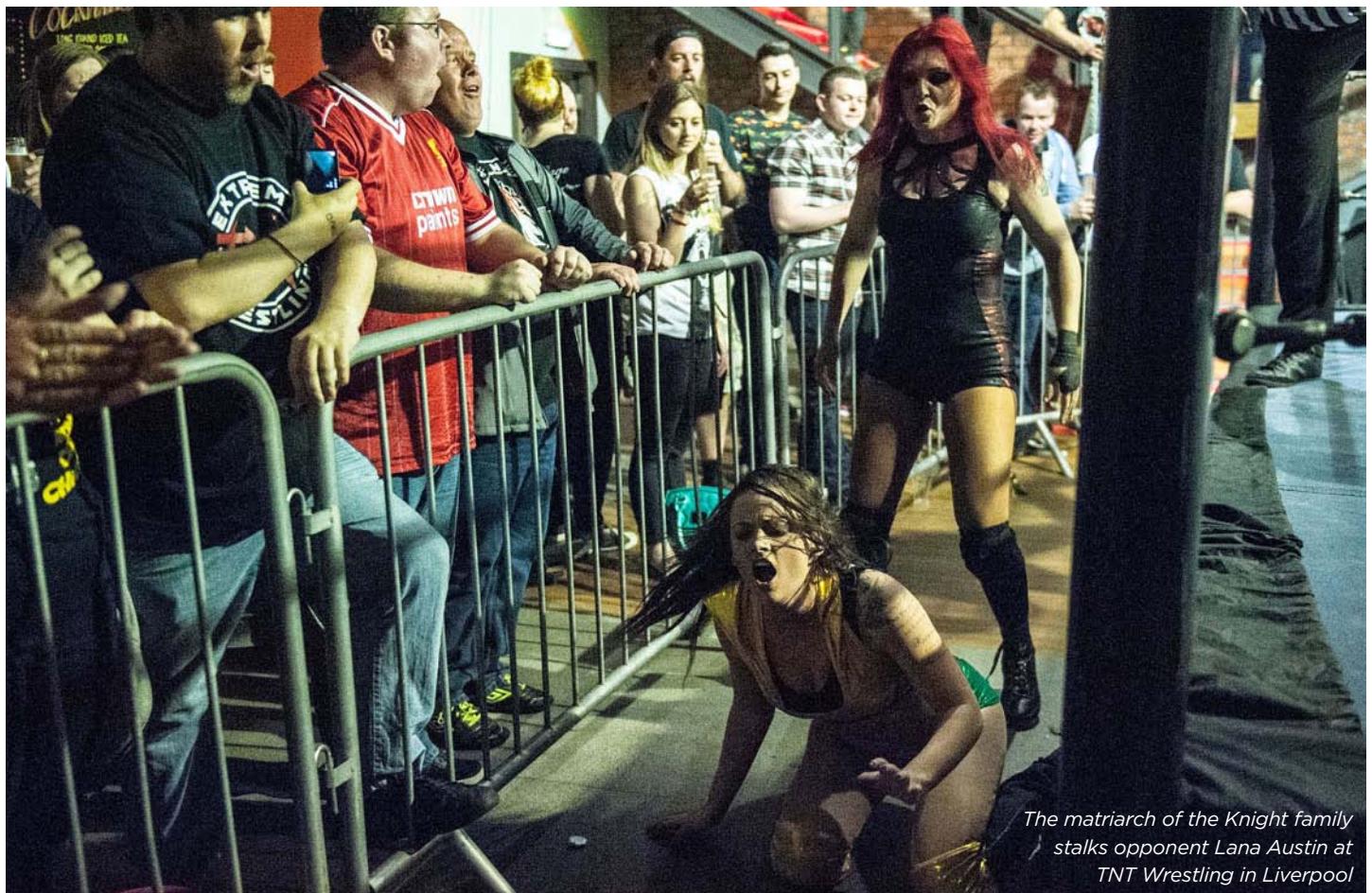
Crusher Mason, and odds and sods with Fit Finlay, so I had a predominately male team surrounding me. They taught me how to look after myself, how to shootfight, they really gave me a fantastic grounding - something women in those days could never have given me because they weren't capable of doing it. That's why, when I started in the business, I didn't really fit in, because the girls couldn't work around me because I didn't do the "girls stuff". Nowadays the girls and the men are trained together, and there's absolutely no difference.

I don't think there should be any difference; the whole aspect of wrestling is to learn the job, not just learn part of the job or what fits whether you are masculine or feminine. When you're a builder, a carpenter, an electrician, you don't learn half the job to what suits you because you're female, you learn the whole of the job, and wrestling should be the same.

I really believe there should be no difference whatsoever in the training.



Amongst others, Saraya was trained Jimmy Ocean and her husband, Ricky Knight



© TONY KNOX

The matriarch of the Knight family stalks opponent Lana Austin at TNT Wrestling in Liverpool

What should new female wrestlers do to overcome any stigma or lack of respect from male wrestlers?

It doesn't exist anymore; you're talking Noah's Ark stuff when women were classed as jokes. Maybe [in the U.S.] there might be a legitimate argument there, but over here it isn't.

There's no difference between a male and a female wrestler – they both have to respect themselves. If anything, the difference is that if somebody is male, they have less opportunity to get to the big time, whereas the girls, if your face fits and you're a perfect 10, it doesn't matter how you wrestle. With the men, you've got to be able to wrestle to get in there. So I think the only [hostility is] the jealousy part that the women wrestlers can climb the ladder quicker than the blokes. But you've still got to put the work in: when

I turn up to shows I get the same respect as anybody else that goes in there.

Should you work any differently when you're in the only women's match on a mainly male show, compared with working on an all-female show?

I don't think there should be a difference working before 10 people or 1,000 people, [or] between a male show or a female show. If you're an ultimate professional, you shouldn't change your style. You should be able to understand the crowd you're before, and give them what they require. You've got different crowds: the Cowboys and Indians crowds, the theatrical crowd, the "ooh ahh" crowd that's all the so-called smart marks. You read the crowd and work accordingly.

I wouldn't change the way I work between a mainly male show and an all-female show.

I've been booked because of my product. Everyone should have the same attitude I have: you go there, you do the job and you work your bloody arse off. To be a professional, you've got to act professional.

It's not a case of male or female shows, it's a case of a specific audience.

What was the first piece of advice you gave to another wrestler?

I don't remember because a lot of the times if somebody asked what you thought of the match, and you told them, they'd get all up their own arse because they expected you to praise them for it. When people come to me and they ask me stuff, I find it very difficult to turn round and give advice if it's not the advice they wanted anyway, and I won't not be straight with them just for their ego.

What I would say to anybody getting in the business is to make sure the people you are training with are reputable, that they've had more than two matches in 10 years. Make sure you go to as many different schools as possible to find the style that fits you, and learn as many different styles as possible. Keep your head down, keep your ears open, act in a respectful way,

"Trainees try to go from A to Z without all the other letters of the alphabet. They start off in January and they want to be in WWE by December"



Roy Knight sails off the top rope to take out Damian O'Connor, Dave Mastiff and even brother Zak Knight

learn locker-room etiquette, and make sure to read a crowd. Study your profession and make it an art form.

What's the biggest mistake trainees often make?

Trying to go from A to Z without all the other letters of the alphabet. They start off in January and they want to be in WWE by December.

There's no easy route, no shortcuts. So instead of wanting the world in two weeks, how about you learn your craft, you go to school? Don't try to run before you can walk, and don't try to do big moves before you're capable of doing them, putting somebody else's body in jeopardy.

They don't seem to want to put the graft in anymore, these young ones. They think, "I'm a professional wrestler. I want to go to the top" and they don't realise that you do your home company, then you get more bookings in the UK, then you go to Europe, then you go to America, Canada, Australia or wherever. I feel deeply that a wrestler should take between eight and 12 years to be out of their circuit; it takes eight to 12 years before you even know this job. People think they're old and done by the time they've been in eight years, but how can you know a craft unless you perfect it? Slow and steady wins the race.



Saraya's daughter, Paige, has become one of the world's most famous female wrestlers

How can young wrestlers get the most out of a training camp or guest seminar?

Write everything down in a book. I've got a book with me that I call my bible, and I'd want a lot of money for it. It's got my life's work in it – it's all in code, obviously, but one day I'll publish it.

Wrestlers forget more than they remember, so if you get to 100 percent of moves and you only remember one percent of that, then you've wasted your time and money on the other 99 percent. Write everything down – every seminar, every little thing. If you go to shows and see a move you like, then write it down.

Put everything in a book and then you won't forget any of it.

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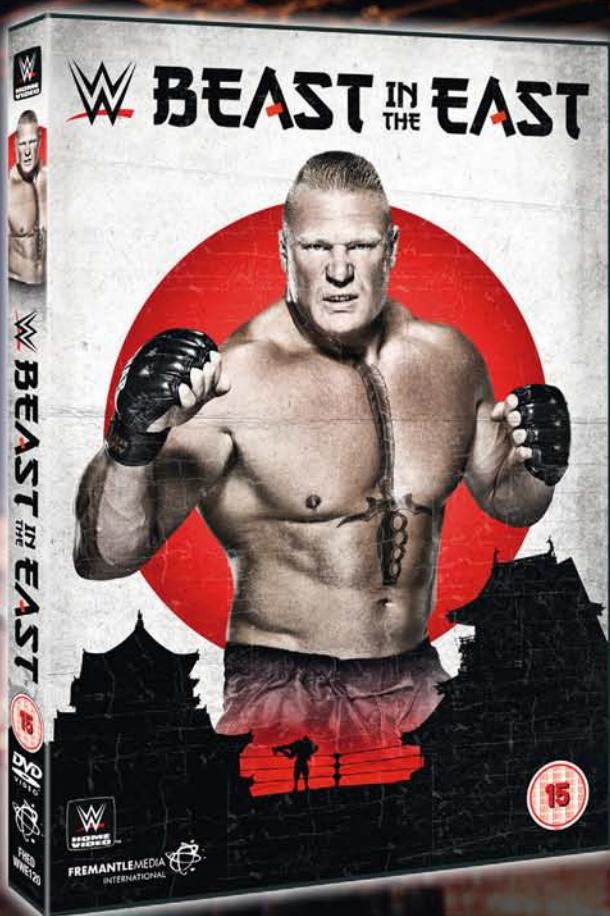
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